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Balancing Pleasure and Pain: the role of motherhood in home education

by

Ruth Beatrice Morton

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of Warwick, Department of Sociology

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Abstract

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Home Education in England and Wales is growing in popularity. Despite this apparent growth, there is currently little research into home education in the UK from a sociological perspective. Based on data collected in an in-depth qualitative study of home educating groups and families during 2007, this thesis examines the motivations, practices and experiences of home educating parents.

Despite the 'alternative' image of home education, constructions of parenthood within home education are highly gendered, with mothers and fathers tending to take on traditional gender roles. Mothers therefore perform the majority of the intense physical and emotional labour of home education. Home education expands the motherhood role beyond that predominantly found in contemporary society (providing fulfilment for many mothers), while simultaneously reinforcing normative images of motherhood. Where fathers are involved in the day-to-day process of home education this tends to be in a secondary role with mothers maintaining a significant role in the home education process. Home education is therefore a meeting point for mothers' constructions of childhood, motherhood and education. These constructions can be split into three 'types': 'Natural', 'Social' and 'Last Resort'.

The interrelation of motherhood, childhood and education within home education and their co-location within the family means that notions of pedagogy and education become an extension of the socialisation process focussed on the individual child rather than education being seen as a separate process. Home education is therefore a project of motherhood which focusses on family and self and relies on the maintenance of a balance between personal labour and fulfilment.

List of Abbreviations

EO Education Otherwise

EWO Education Welfare Officer

HE Home Education (abbreviation often used by home educators)

LA Local Authority

NHS National Health Service

SEN Special Educational Needs

Introduction

This is the first in-depth qualitative sociological study of home educating parents in England and Wales. Through the lens of home education this thesis examines the tensions and complexities of the interactions between childhood, parenthood, education and their place in wider society and in relation to the state.

There is a widespread perception in political, media and public discourse that education in England and Wales is in crisis. This is expressed in news headlines and in the constantly changing educational policy of recent governments (Maguire, Perryman et al. 2011). The school system in England is perceived to be failing in terms of pupils' academic achievement, with discussion about the “dumbing down” of the curriculum, and in terms of behaviour. This sense of educational failure, particularly in the state-maintained education sector, has also been well documented in social research, both West and Noden (2003) and Roker (1993) (for example) found that parents' worries about discipline and achievement in maintained schools were a key reason behind the choice of private education for their children, whilst Maguire et al (2011) document the pressures upon schools to be more than 'ordinary'.

At the same time as there is public concern about education, in the past two decades there has been increasing concern in the UK over the perceived changing nature of childhood, with debate over whether childhood is disappearing, growing longer or a mix of both. Since Aries (1962) first published *Histories of Childhood,* the concept of childhood as a social construct rather than a biological given has been explored by many sociologists and has

led to the growth of the Sociology of Childhood as a field in its own right. As well as academic debate over the changes in childhood over time, there has also been public anxiety. This anxiety has been prompted in part by the publicity over tragedies such as the murder of toddler Jamie Bulger by two ten year olds in 1993 and their subsequent release from custody in 2001; the abduction of Madeleine McCann in 2007; and also incidents of cyber-bullying and 'happy-slapping' where children film and circulate physical assaults using mobile phones. Such publicity has created fears that childhood is becoming both corrupt and a more vulnerable state (Kehily 2004, Postman 1983, Palmer 2009, Palmer 2006).

Despite changing constructions of both adulthood and childhood, parents are still seen as crucial influences in the development of their children, not only in terms of their educational achievement but also with regard to their socialisation and development into full citizens of society (Duerr Berrick, Gilbert 2008, Lee 2005). During, and following, the extensive riots in England in August 2011, when the media focussed on the young age of many of the rioters (with a high proportion reported to be under the age of 16), one of the most prominent questions from commentators was about the role of their parents. Questions were asked, and continue to be asked, regarding the whereabouts of those children's parents, their control (or lack of) over their children, and their socialisation of their children. These questions highlight the importance of the parental role in the social consciousness; that, although parenting work is un-paid, the labour involved in it largely unacknowledged, and its status low, it is still regarded as formational, both for the individual and for the future of society (Duerr Berrick, Gilbert 2008, Lee 2005). Parenting work, although so termed, in

such contexts tends to refer to the socialising and nurturing role that is usually associated with and assumed to be carried out by mothers within the home environment (Hughes, Burgess et al. 1991, Stambach, David 2005).

Education is inextricably caught up in the complex relationship between home, parenthood and childhood. Several bodies have contested control over education: The state effectively has a 'monopoly' over education in its provision of state-funded educational institutions for over ninety percent of what are legally termed children of 'compulsory school age'. At the same time the child has a right to receive education; and the parent has responsibility for their child's education with a right to have their wishes for that education considered (Education Act, 1996). These rights, responsibilities and power relationships exist in tension and this means that education spans many of the debates around the relationship between parent and child, public and private (David 1999, Landeros 2011).

Home education has emerged as a growing phenomenon in England and Wales, becoming increasingly prominent over the past 10 years. Exactly how many children are educated at home is currently unknown, but estimates indicate that there has been substantial growth in that number over the past 15 to 20 years. Statistics put forward by advocates of home education suggest that in the last decade there has been an increase in the number of home educated children in the UK from around 10,000 in 1995 (Meighan 1995) to around 50,000 at present (Education Otherwise 2008); although government commissioned research states that the true number of home educators cannot currently be estimated (Hopwood, O'Neill et al. 2007). Home education hit the national headlines in 2010 following the government commissioned Badman

Report (Badman 2009) which arose from concerns that home education might be veiling cases of child abuse and children being deprived of education. Although Badman found no evidence that this might be the case, his report recommended a system of registration and monitoring for home educators. These recommendations resulted in proposals to modify regulatory legislation as part of the 2009 Children and Families Bill, these were abandoned following substantial opposition from home educators and also a lack of time prior to the 2010 parliamentary election.

Despite this recent prominence, home education is currently an under-researched and under-theorised area in England and Wales. Home education has been almost totally ignored by the Sociology of Education and existing research into home education, both here and abroad, has tended to focus very narrowly on home education from an educational or psychological viewpoint, rather than examining it within a wider social context. Although home educating parents tend to be the key participants and respondents in such research they are very rarely seen as being of interest in their own right.

The growth of home education presents a valuable opportunity to explore alternative models of education, challenging the common assumption that 'education' is synonymous with 'schooling', and presenting alternative interpretations and emphases of pedagogy. It is also important to understand the reasons behind parents' choice of home education as these provide an insight into public dissatisfaction with mainstream, school-based education and into parents' constructions of their position and role as parents and within wider society. Home education in many ways embodies the meeting of childhood, education and parenthood. An understanding of the ways in which home

educating parents perceive and construct the intersection of childhood, education and their parental role is important to understanding both the growing phenomenon of home education and the implications of different understandings of childhood and parenthood in society. This thesis therefore takes that valuable opportunity and provides new contributions to knowledge of home education and to the field of the Sociology of Education in general.

Defining the Research Problem

In the US, home education has for some time been seen as a viable alternative to school-based education. Writers such as Apple (2000), Lubienski (2003) and Van Galen (1988) have examined the ideological foundations of home education in the US and they make specific links to political and religious viewpoints, particularly to the conservative religious right. However, it seems that there are significant differences between home-education principles and practices in the UK and the US (Meighan 1995). While international and US-based research is valuable in the contributions it can make to the construction of a theoretical framework, there is therefore a question as to how relevant any empirical findings are to the UK context. Research by Rothermel (2003), Webb (1999) and Meighan (2001) as well as accounts of home-schooling such as those by Dowty (2000) suggest that home-schooling in the UK is carried out by families from a wide range of political viewpoints, religious backgrounds, socio-economic groups and diverse family structures[1]. This suggests that it is not possible simply to apply theorising and research from elsewhere in the world to the home education "scene" in the UK; rather that a UK-specific body of

1 although Stevens (2003) and Collom (2005) would argue that this is also the case in the US, although to a lesser extent

knowledge needs to be created. Unfortunately, while Rothermel's (2003, 2002, 2011) research appears to have been conducted from a relatively objective perspective, much other writing on home education in the UK has not been so. Whilst Rothermel (2011) disagrees with the suggestion that home education in England and Wales is under-researched (Morton 2010), a large proportion of the research that she cites is either biased in favour of home education, no longer accessible, or carried out with the express aim of promoting home education; although this situation is starting to improve. Both Port (1989) and Meighan (2001, 1997), for example, write from a viewpoint that is distinctly uncritical towards home education. In a similar vein, Fortune-Wood's (Fortune-Wood 2005) account of home education, while setting itself out as an objective, theoretical examination of the principles of home education, is inherently biased in favour of home-education and reflects his position as a home education activist.

Home education in the UK is, however, as already stated, growing in popularity and is increasingly being recognised by government and parents as an alternative to traditional systems of education[2]. The post-1997 period has witnessed an increased concern with regard to the structure of educational provision, both in public policy arenas and within society as a whole; something that has not disappeared with the current coalition government who have continued to make changes to the structure of education in England and Wales. This, and the home education debate are also linked to government emphasis on the marketisation of education and the creation of choice in education

2 Government recognition is, however, rarely open, but rather is to be found in the commissioning of research into home education and the appearance of information on home education on the DfES website as well as the recent proposals (now dropped) to register all home educators.

(Maguire, Perryman et al. 2011, Aurini, Davies 2005, Apple 2006). As the UK seeks to solve both the real and perceived problems of its incumbent schooling system there is much debate about the alternatives on offer. This debate covers curriculum, pedagogy and educational structures, and this thesis suggests that an understanding of the practices of home education has a role to play in the broader policy debate and in understanding some of the public dissatisfaction with the current school system.

Whilst structural approaches have often been dominant within the Sociology of Education, authors within the field of educational choice can be seen to represent both sides of the structure/agency divide. For example, Ball, Bowe and Gerwitz (1997) have emphasised the structural issues surrounding school choice policies, arguing the conceptual importance of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1997) within the choice process in terms of the maximisation of middle class advantage (see also Ball 2003). Alternatively, Gorard (1997) and Allatt (1996) see middle-class choosers as more rational and therefore making individual decisions about schooling. Writers such as Reay (1996) have also looked at the choice process for working class parents and examined the ways in which individual values and structural constraints interact in influencing educational choices. Whilst the subject of educational choice is an area that has been considered by a number of authors, these studies are largely within the context of choices within the state sector, with private schools occasionally being referred to as an option. Choices about whether to engage with the dominant education model of the school system or to leave that system, whilst they may draw on the choice-making processes described in the literature are also likely to have different facets. Sociological studies about the choice process

surrounding or involving home education, and therefore the leaving of the school system, seem non-existent in England and Wales, a gap that this thesis begins to fill.

Looking at the motivations and practices of home educating families, this research sits at a nexus between parenthoods, education and childhoods, all of which are key areas of social concern in today's society. As already stated, there are debates as to whether childhood is disappearing as children are less protected from adult content in the media and more generally; or whether childhood is being overly-prolonged with children being wrapped in 'cotton-wool' to protect them from real and imaginary dangers, resulting in young adults who lack independence (Lee 2005). Linked to the concerns about the nature of childhood are questions about the responsibilities and rights of parents versus the state, and the rights of children. These have led to accusations of invasions of privacy by the state entering into the private sphere of the home; for example with debates over whether to ban 'smacking' and David (1999, along with Alldred, David et al. 2002) notes the increased surveillance of the state over the interactions between parents, children and education. With increased awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), as well as concern about both anti-social behaviour and political apathy amongst young people, the issue of children and young people's competence to make decisions and act as agents has become more public (Lee 2005, Burr 2004) and questions about parental rights are now often set against the rights and competencies of the child at the same time as the parental role continues to be regarded as pivotal in determining the social outcome of childhood (Monk 2004). The process of home education by its very nature relies on the parent-

child relationship and therefore both draws upon and illuminates constructions of childhood and parenthood.

The existing literature on home education, and the areas in which that literature is deficient, provide a theoretical basis for this piece of research. As already noted, there is a lack of existing rigorous research on home education and my research will therefore contribute to the creation of a theoretical framework for the study of home education. From the literature key theoretical concepts and issues emerge. The first issue is the debate over what education is and the fact that school and education are often seen as synonymous. Home education challenges traditional conceptions and models of education and can possibly contribute to their evolution. This research contributes to the critical debate over the nature and purposes of education and related to this is the subject of the relationship between home educators and the state. The next issue is the construction of childhood and the idealisation of that construction. The related question of the construction of parenthood remains un-answered by the home education literature and therefore becomes an area for conceptual exploration, drawing on a broader body of literature. Finally, there is the question of the interaction of motivations and choice in home education and the ways in which these intersect with constructions of education in home educators' pedagogical practices.

As discussed above, current debates over education question both the institutional structures of the school system in England and Wales and the pedagogical models used within schools. There is also an ongoing debate over the nature of childhood and parenthood which impacts upon that educational debate. These, combined with the limited research into home education,

particularly in England and Wales, raise the question of the relationship of home education to school-based education and the rationales of home educating parents in their choice to home educate. The overall theoretical and analytical framework for my research therefore considers the interactions of individual parents, and their choice-making processes and negotiations, within and in relation to wider social structures.

The key research questions that framed this study were therefore:

- How do home educating parents position themselves in relation to institutional models of education and how does this relate to their reasons for home educating?
- What is the inter-relationship of parents' motivations in home educating with their pedagogical models and practices?
- How do parents experience parenthood through home education?

Following from the research questions stated above, my research objectives were:

- **To synthesise existing policy, thinking and research on home education as a principle - and its practice in England and Wales** A review of the literature on home education, both in England and Wales and further afield, will provide a firm basis for the creation of a theoretical and analytical framework within which home education in England and Wales can be examined. Simultaneously, there appears to be no current critical sociological synthesis of the literature on home education; and my literature review, and the theoretical and analytical frameworks that

stem from it, will therefore be valuable, both in its contribution to the wider public debate and in informing public policy on home education.

- **To document parents' reasons for undertaking home education and their pedagogical practices in doing so.** As home education is currently an under-researched area in England and Wales, any data collected on the practices and motivations of parents are valuable in informing further research and form the basis for greater understanding of home education as a growing phenomenon.

- **To produce analyses of home educating parents' rationales and practices.** This will give an understanding of how home educators see themselves in relation to institutional models of education. An understanding of parents' constructions of education and the ways in which these translate into their practices in home educating is important, both in terms of understanding home education and in understanding home educators' positioning with regard to school.

- **To document and analyse home educating parents' experiences of home education.** To date there has been no specific focus on the experiences of home educating parents in England and Wales and very little emphasis world-wide. An understanding of parents' experiences of home education will give valuable insight into their underlying motivations and priorities in home education. Such an analysis will also improve understanding of the relationships between children, parents and the notion of education.

- **To analyse the implications of my findings in considering both home-based and mainstream education in England and Wales.** Potentially the growth of home education has significant implications for education structures and policies in the UK. In gaining a greater understanding of how home educating families position themselves in regard to school-based education, their understanding of the parental role, and also of the pedagogical practices that evolve in such families, it is possible firstly to understand more about the home education movement. But secondly this understanding also provides insight into alternative models and practices of education that can be related to school-based learning and a new perspective on some of the issues and problems facing mainstream schooling.

This thesis therefore sets out to provide an in-depth examination of home educator's experiences, motivations and pedagogical practices on both an individual and structural basis. To this end, seeking depth of understanding, the research behind this thesis drew on qualitative research methodologies, employing an iterative and inductive approach to an area where there was only limited background information from which to extract potential theoretical frameworks. The analysis is therefore based upon a collection of interviews, participant and non-participant observations involving around 40 home educating families to a greater or lesser extent. The data was gathered over a six month period in 2007.

Both childhood and education are central to modern societies, being experiences that are commonly held by all in one form or another. It is therefore

important that we understand the different ways that education, childhood and the associated state of parenthood are constructed by home educators and the potential impact and implications for wider society. Analysing my data through the themes raised by the literature and my research questions above, this thesis argues that the different constructions of childhood and parenthood by home educators affects their choices surrounding education and that their choices, methods and motivations in home education are inextricably intertwined with those constructions.

The genesis of this thesis lies in my varied personal experiences of education. Growing up I attended nine schools in three different countries, leading me to question assumptions I encountered about how education 'should' be carried out and the substantive nature of schooling. This sense of 'otherness' in educational terms alongside my, successful negotiation of schooling (this despite or even, I believe, because of my 'abnormal' experiences), made me interested in non-conventional forms of education. This questioning was further fed by my experiences as a student of Sociology at the University of Warwick, as an educational assistant in a variety of Special Needs provision in the UK, and as a teacher in both the state and private sectors in England. Friendships with two families who educated their children at home sparked my interest in home education in particular and a series of marked differences in their motivations and methods of educating led me to look at home education from an academic viewpoint as a sociologist. I discovered that there was a paucity of research on this topic and realised, to paraphrase C. Wright Mills (1978), that my private concerns did indeed mirror a number of broader public questions as to the extent and nature of home education in the UK.

Although I was fascinated by home education I also felt ambivalent about it. As Tooley (2000) notes, it is very difficult to step outside of and imagine alternatives to models of education that have formed integral parts of our social development and assumptions. This combination of ambivalence and sociological inquisitiveness, strongly influenced my exploratory epistemological approach and therefore the iterative and predominantly inductive research process that produced this thesis.

Thesis Structure

Chapter 1, *Home Education: A Background,* sets the scene with a review of the literature to establish the field and explore the phenomenon that is home education. I explore what is known about the numbers and characteristics of home educators in England and Wales at present before turning to examine the legal status of home education and the related literature on home educators' attitudes towards the state and school, highlighting a discourse of persecution that runs through much popular writing on home education.

Chapter 2, *Principles and Practice,* picks up on my research questions and continues to examine the literature through their lens. Where the literature on parental motivations, pedagogical practices and parental experiences of home education is limited I draw on broader sociological literatures in the fields of education, motherhood and childhood.

Chapter 3, *Researching Home Education: Tales from the Living Room*, outlines the methodology used in my study and reflects upon the research process and the development of the study, before we progress to Chapter 4 and the analysis

of my findings. *Meanings and Motivations* looks at the choice of home education in terms of home educators positioning in relation to state and school. I examine the rupture or rejection of the assumed state-parent co-responsibility relationship that occurs when parents choose to home educate their children. Three broad types of home educator are identified and their differing attitudes towards state and school and resulting motivations to home educate are examined. This exploration confirms a fear of persecution by authorities and professionals among home educators, building the positing of a discourse of persecution in Chapter 1. The motivations of Last Resort home educators in particular raises the question of home education as an educational choice and this is examined at the end of the chapter.

The division of labour within home education and its key actors are explored in Chapter 5: *Mothers and their Children*. Home educators' constructions of childhood and motherhood are explored, revealing varying notions of childhood across the three types, but consistently conventional constructions of motherhood. The positioning of motherhood as a relational role, dependent upon the existence of the child is deeply drawn upon by home educators and the notion of the child as a vulnerable individual creates an relationship of co-dependency in which the mothering role is crucial. The construction of parental roles following a Parsonian model is explored and examples of fathers' involvement in home education reinforce rather than challenge this division of labour.

Having ascertained who is involved in home education on a day-to-day basis and the models behind home education; Chapter 6, *Pedagogy and Praxis,* explores the process of home education itself. Home educators are found to

have universally broad definitions of education, with the notion of education becoming an extension of the primary socialisation process that is part of the mothering role. The aims of home education are therefore primarily surrounding the development and equipping of the child to live in society as an adult. Despite their common definitions and aims, the three types of home educator vary in how they perform home education with their attitudes towards state and school and their constructions of childhood influencing their home educating practices. What is held in common is the predominant use of conventional learning methods and the adoption of conventional learning aims, meaning that while home educators like to see themselves as re-imagining education there is a real question as to whether this is the case.

The construction of motherhood as a vital role and the absorption of education into the broader project of maternal socialisation brings us to Chapter 7: *Labour and Love.* Identifying home education as a mother-centric enterprise, this chapter examines the fulfilment that mothers gain through the expansion of their mothering role in home education and also the labour and sacrifices demanded by that same role. The notion of a precarious balance is developed which defines the success of home education from mothers' point of view.

My concluding chapter, *Motherhood through childhood*, brings together the findings of my thesis and gives an overall picture of those findings and also of their possible implications and applications, both in terms of contributions to knowledge and potential areas for further research.

1 Home Education: A Background

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to broaden the understanding of home education in England and Wales, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of home educating parents. It is a topic on which there is limited existing research. This is the case even in the United States, which has spawned the greatest proportion of research into home education. As popular interest grows, however, the body of research is also growing and there are now a number of researchers in different fields worldwide focussing on questions around home education.

Within the wider body of research on home education worldwide, there is very little research specifically on home education in England and Wales. There is, however, a body of popular literature; often accounts written by home educating parents (usually mothers) of their day-to-day lifestyles, usually with the aim of encouraging other parents who may be considering home education themselves (see for example Fortune-Wood 2001, Dowty 2000, Bendell 1987). What more academic research there is, is often written from a pro-home education stance with little critical analysis of the wider social and educational impact of home education or examination of its potential problems. This uncritical stance brings the validity and reliability of such research into question as it is not clear to what extent evidence has been selected to fit researchers' viewpoints and expected findings. Examples of this uncritical stance can be seen in the work of Meighan (2001, 1997, 1995), Fortune-Wood (2006) and

Webb (1999, 1989), which assume the benevolent nature of home education without seeming to address the role of home education in a wider social context.

In terms of academic fields generating research on home education, the majority of research has stemmed from the area of educational studies, often with a psychological slant; see for example the work of Rothermel (2011), Lees (2011) and Thomas (2007). There has been limited treatment of home education from a sociological perspective, perhaps accounting for the reluctance by researchers to consider home education within its wider social context.

The age of much of the research into home education must also be taken into account when considering its usefulness. The British education system has changed rapidly and significantly in recent years (Maguire, Perryman et al. 2011), and continues to change rapidly. Along with changes in the home education movement over this time (although such changes are difficult to pinpoint) this means that much of the existing empirical research, particularly that which is more than ten years old, may be of limited relevance in describing, analysing or informing judgements about today's home education movement in England and Wales.

Across this chapter and the next, therefore, this literature review does several things. Firstly it sets out the context for home education drawing on both British and international literature, painting a broad picture of what is known about home education by making use of both research-based and popular literature. I then review home education literature as it relates to the research questions

addressed by this thesis, focussing on parents' attitudes towards school and the state, motivations for home education, pedagogical models and practices and parents' own experiences of home education. As identified, there is limited research into home education, especially from a sociological viewpoint and relating to parents' roles in home education; and part of the purpose of this review is therefore to identify the gaps in the existing literature. This literature review therefore draws on relevant literature from the broader fields of education, childhood, motherhood and parenthood to create a theoretical basis for this thesis.

What is Home Education?

Defining home education is not itself an easy task. At a basic level home education seems to be commonly identified as the education of children carried out primarily by parents within and around the home, in place of school-based education. It is this broad definition of home education that will be used throughout the thesis. However, even having taken this definition, the boundaries between home education, home tutoring and small schools can be unclear. Home educators may make use of qualified tutors within the home for some subjects, may send their children to school part-time (often known as flexi-schooling), or, in the US, may organise themselves as a school in order to obtain state funding. Also rationales for home educating and the pedagogical models and practices of home educators, appear to vary widely. Even the terms used to refer to home education (“home-based education”, “homeschooling”, “deschooling”,” unschooling”, “education otherwise”, “autonomous education” to name a few) reveal a host of different attitudes to

what shall here (for simplicity and clarity's sake) be referred to as home education.

The history of home education can be traced back to the beginnings of society; parents have always had an important role in their children's learning – teaching them to talk, walk and interact in a socially appropriate way with those around them. Prior to the introduction and growth of state-funded and regulated school-based education from the late nineteenth century onwards, the family and the home were at the centre of education (Gittins 2004, Aries 1962) with the majority of learning taking place in an informal manner with knowledge passed from generation to generation. Tooley (2000) argues that, even prior to the widespread introduction of school-based education, levels of literacy were high in Britain, pointing to an efficient informal learning system. Even after the nationwide introduction of state-funded schooling, education at home, often under a tutor or governess, remained common for many upper and middle-class children until the Second World War (Bendell 1987). Charlotte Mason (1920), with her practical advice and advocacy of home education in the early twentieth century is often seen as the founder of the home education movement (Boulter 1989). In this sense, home education has extensive roots as the 'original' form of education, however, the relationship of the current home education movement to its historical roots is contested.

After the Second World War, home education seems to have essentially disappeared from public view and consciousness until the late 1970s. Following court cases involving Iris Harrison who had chosen to home educate her children and had encountered significant resistance from the authorities, the organisation Education Otherwise was founded to provide support to home

educating families (Petrie 1992). Since then home education is reported to have grown substantially (see discussion of numbers below), although data on its extent remains unreliable.

The positioning of contemporary home education in relation to modern and premodern conceptions of society is open to debate. One viewpoint is to see home education today as continuous with home education in the past or even as a return to past, family-based, models of education. Barratt-Peacock (2003), for example, locates contemporary home education in Australia in an historical context; with today's home education practices as part of a logical historical continuum. Because of Australia's widely dispersed outback population, forms of home education have remained a clear part of the Australian culture and home education has never fallen out of use and become anomalous in the way it has in Europe and the US. Barratt-Peacock's analysis can therefore be seen as specific to its Australian context. Mayberry (1989) also places the North American home education movement in a historical continuum. She argues that

> "Home education in the United States is a vivid example of an increasing number of families attempting to reverse the history of their diminished control over the education of their children." (p.172)

Others argue that current home education is very different from that of earlier times and that it is now what Neuman and Aviram (2003) term 'postmodern'. This viewpoint sees it as entirely separate from the historical practice. Both Apple (2000) and Lubienski (2003) reject claims that current home education is

a return to historical forms of education, arguing instead that it is instead a product of growing individualism and the development of markets in education. Similarly, Aurini and Davies (2005) position families' choices to home educate within the wider growth of choice within the education sector, essentially categorising it as another form of private education. They also link the growth of home education to the emergence of an 'intensive parenting'[3] culture among middle class families. Meighan (1995) also associates home education with both individualistic and choice trends within education, looking at home education's offering of individualised learning, increasingly seen as important to achievement. Meighan suggests that models of home education indicate “ways of regenerating and reconstructing education systems in general and schools in particular, in the direction of more flexibility, suitable for the post-modern scene.” (Meighan 1995 :275).

Neuman and Aviram (2003), although arguing that much home education can be described as postmodern, see home education as existing in modern or pre-modern forms depending on families' motivations and values. They particularly separate those families who home educate for religious reasons from what they term 'postmodern' forms of home education, in contrast to Apple's (2000) view of religiously motivated home educators as the prime expression of postmodern, neoliberal values and motivations. This difference in perception may, however, highlight the differences between home education in the US and in Israel, and therefore home education as being culturally relative, its cultures being moulded by the wider culture(s) of the society in which it is placed.

3 This ignores the typically gendered nature of such parenting (Stambach, David 2005, Hays 1998), explored later.

Despite these potential cultural differences, the established nature of home education in the United States is seen as providing an important legacy for home educating communities around the world. Stevens (2003) argues that the growing acceptance and normalisation of home education in the US has made it easier for home educators in other countries to gain acceptance. Both Stevens (2003) and de Waal and Theron (2003) argue that home education in the US has been normalised to the extent that it is seen as another choice in the educational market, with established organisations, curricula and standardised academic assessment mechanisms. In a similar vein, Collom (2005) provides evidence that the organising of home educators through home education Charter Schools is a further sign of the acceptance of home education as one form of education among many. This acceptance of home education is also seen in the fact that many universities welcome or even actively recruit home educated students (Meighan 1995). At the same time, however, claims of this integration as a form of mainstream education are perhaps to be questioned when, at the same time as home education is supposedly becoming universally accepted and integrated, the US is also seeing the establishment of universities specifically for home educated students (Apple 2000). This situation is substantially different from that of England and Wales where home education cannot currently be described as either established or widely accepted.

Numbers and characteristics of home educators in England and Wales

There is no requirement for home educating families in England and Wales to register with their Local Authority meaning that there is no comprehensive

record of home educating families, although many[4] become known to their local authorities either by choice, or upon deregistering their children from state-maintained schools. Therefore, as not all families are members of a home education organisation, while others may be members of more than one, there is no clear estimate of the number of children being home educated or of the number of families home educating in England and Wales. Some estimates have been attempted – both Petrie (1992) and Lowden (1994) surveyed LEAs (now LAs) to gain figures of children being home educated and came up with numbers of around 3-5,000. These figures are, however, now quite old and advocates of home education have given much higher estimated figures of up to 150,000 children being educated at home (Fortune-Wood 2005b), although it is not clear what such estimates are based upon. Hopwood et al (Hopwood, O'Neill et al. 2007) estimated that around 16,000 home educated children were known to Local Authorities, more than 3 times as many as estimated by Lowden and Petrie just over a decade earlier, suggesting significant growth, although Hopwood et al deemed a comprehensive assessment of numbers of home educated children to be infeasible because of the lack of compulsory registration. Education Otherwise currently believe there to be in the region of 40,000 home educated children in England and Wales (Education Otherwise 2008)[5].

In terms of the proportion of children in England and Wales who are home educated, even given the Education Otherwise estimate of 40,000, this represents a very small proportion (around 0.5%) of the 7.6 million children of

4 but by no means all (Ofsted 2010)

5 These appear to be Education Otherwise's most recent estimate as this was still their quoted figure in August 2011. It is not clear on what evidence they base this estimate.

'compulsory school age' in 2008 in the UK (Office for National Statistics 2011). This suggests that, while home education may be a growing phenomenon in England and Wales it is still a long way from becoming a normalised and widely spread form of education.

In terms of the characteristics of home educators in the UK, again relatively little detailed research has been carried out and the details of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds and family structure have not been rigorously examined. The lack of any comprehensive list of home educators and the relatively hidden nature of the home educating population makes finding such information infeasible (Hopwood, O'Neill et al. 2007). Meighan (1995), Barson (2004) and Bendell (1987) all describe the home educating population as diverse and cite examples of single mothers living on state benefits as 'proof' of the socio-economic diversity; however, no substantive figures are offered.

In addition to uncertainty over the parameters of the home educating population at any one time, there is also the question of to what extent the population changes year on year, either in terms of absolute numbers or of the social characteristics of home educators. Both Barson (2004) and Thomas (1998) claim that the home educating population is highly fluid, with families moving between school-based and home-based education and with choices about home education being made on an ongoing basis related to each individual child.

Worldwide, uncertainty about the characteristics of the home educating population is perpetuated and researchers disagree on how to describe the characteristics of home educating families and also, therefore, on how to

categorise them. While Van Galen (1988) sees the characteristics of home educating families as directly linked to their motivations for home educating, more recent writing increasingly argues that they are socially, economically and politically diverse. The traditional and prevailing image of home educators, particularly in the US, is of a group dominated by the middle class and politically conservative religious right, a group in posession of significant amounts of financial and social capital (Apple 2000, Lubienski 2003, Cizek 1994) and it is this group that Van Galen's research depicts as dominant. But it has also been argued that other socio-economic and political groups are increasingly joining the ranks of home educators. Collom (2005) argues that the influence of the affluent religious right is waning with more families home educating on pedagogical and academic grounds, while Stevens (2003) claims that home educators have always been socio-economically and ethnically diverse, but that this diversity is now becoming more visible, having formerly been obscured by the prominence of religious home educators. Unfortunately because of the lack of reliable data on the home educating population (a problem which persists abroad as well as in England and Wales), whilst there are many assertions regarding the diversity of home educators, there is no comprehensive survey data to support the debate.

Legal status

In order to understand the position of home education and the relationships between home educating parents, school and the state it is vital to first understand the underlying legal standing of home education and government attitudes to home educators.

The legal status of home education varies from country to country and, within federal systems such as the United States, from state to state. As an example, until relatively recently in Australia home education held a 'default' status whereby legislation neither forbade it nor explicitly provided for it, however, legislation has now been passed in some states clarifying its status and compelling home educating families to register with the education authorities (Barratt-Peacock 2003). By far the most common situation seems to be that of countries such as Sweden, Canada and much of the United States, where legislation of compulsory schooling has been modified to provide exemptions for home educating families, who are normally required to register with the authorities, and in some cases to apply for permission to home educate (Stevens 2003, de Waal, Theron 2003, Brabant, Bourdon et al. 2003, Villalba 2003). The situation in Germany, as outlined by Speigler (2003) and Monk (2003), where home education is illegal and education and schooling are legally defined as being one and the same, appears to be uncommon. There therefore appears to be no international consensus on the benefits or problems of home education, and therefore no consensus upon its status in law. As a result, in many countries, including England and Wales, the legal status of home education has come about as a 'default' position based upon the wording of legislation designed to instate universal schooling (Neuman, Aviram 2003).

The legal basis for home education in England and Wales can be found originally in the 1944 Education Act and is re-stated in the 1996 Education Act:

> The parent of every child of *compulsory school age* shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable-

(a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and

(b) to any special educational needs he may have,

either by regular attendance at school *or otherwise* .

(1996 Education Act: Section 7, *emphasis mine*)

As can be seen, this places responsibility for a child's education upon the parents rather than the state. While it does not explicitly mention home education, in stating that a child's compulsory education may take place at school “or otherwise” the legal space for home education is created. However, at the same time schooling and education are conflated and assumed to be one and the same: the term “compulsory school age” is used several times in the 1996 Education Act, underlining both the common assumption that school attendance is a legal requirement and the confusion even within law as to what is meant by 'education' (Monk 2003).

This distinction (or lack of distinction) between “education” and “schooling” is at the basis of much legal debate over home education (Speigler 2003, Monk 2003). This conflation appears to be common in Western societies, where the normalisation of school attendance has lead to the assumption that education is synonymous with school (Monk 2003, Meighan 1992, Holt 1984)[6]. This confusion is perpetuated within the Sociology of Education where studies of

6 The blurred distinction between education and schooling may account for the semantics surrounding the terms used by home educators in England and Wales. Use of the term “education otherwise” seems to be an attempt by home educators to legitimise their position outside the school system by referral to its legal status. While 'homeschooling” is a generally accepted term in the United States, in the UK it has too many associations with conventional school-based education and the term “home education” is preferred.

schools are almost universally represented and discussed as studies of 'education'.

Such confusion between 'education' and 'schooling' has meant that, although home education is acknowledged as a legal alternative to school attendance in England and Wales, there has been confrontation in the past between authorities and parents wishing to home educate their children. The most famous example relates to Joy Baker, a mother who went through lengthy court battles between 1952 and 1962 and moved several times during this period hoping to find a Local Education Authority (LEA) who would be sympathetic to her wish and efforts to home educate her children (Webb 1999, Baker 1964). Even today, when home education is gaining a measure of acceptance, the websites run by home education organisations such as Education Otherwise[7] and AHED[8] maintain the understanding that there can still be conflict between home educating families and the State.

Parental motivations and attitudes to school and state

Whilst studies of motivations for home education have been carried out elsewhere (particularly in North America), there has been relatively little attention paid by academia to the motivations of British home educating families. The popular literature suggests a range of pragmatic reasons to supplement the theoretical models discussed earlier. So Schinas (2005) and her family chose home education as a practical solution to education suited to their mobile lifestyle upon a cruising yacht. Others have chosen home education as a solution to problems of bullying, school phobia and the

7 See their campaign website: http://www.freedomforchildrentogrow.org/csfbill.htm
8 http://www.ahed.org.uk/sop.html

perceived failure of the state system to meet children's special educational needs (Dowty 2000, Port 1989, Knox 1989, Cassidy 2005).

Both Thomas (1998) and Rothermel (2003) note a wide range of motivations for home educating among families. Thomas does not attempt to categorise motivations, giving descriptive rather than analytical accounts[9], while Rothermel argues that the motivations of UK families in their choices to home educate are too diverse to categorise. Jeffs (2002) sees the growth of home education as motivated by families' wishes to escape from state control and what he terms 'oppressive' educational practices which do not allow children's learning to follow an individualised course. Bendell (1987), in a work which is part academic and part popular, creates her own model of motivations – dividing them into the 'practical' and the 'poetical', with poetical motives being those that are idealistic about learning for learning's sake and family unity, while the practical are those about access to effective schooling and the prospect of higher achievement at home than at school.

Data from elsewhere in the world also suggests that motivations for home educating are varied. Existing research and theorising have constructed numerous ways of categorising parents' motivations. As already mentioned, Van Galen's (1988, 1991) US research splits parents into two groups: ideologues and pedagogues, based upon their initial motivations for home educating. Ideologues are those parents who home educate for ideological reasons, being discontent with the ideology transmitted in schools these parents are described by Van Galen as typically conservative Christians. Pedagogues

9 Thomas also often fails to identify which of his respondents were Australian and which British, making it difficult to ascertain which of his findings relate to the UK.

choose to home educate their children for academic and pedagogical reasons, tending to be highly critical of the structures of schools and the ways in which they recreate and perpetuate social and academic inequalities. Although Van Galen's work is still regarded as seminal and of key importance, others have argued that her characterisations are over-simplified and that parental motivations in home educating are much more complex with each family having a variety of motivating factors with some more important than others (Rothermel 2003).

Along with Van Galen, several researchers have identified religion as an important initial motivator for home educating, particularly in the US. Cizek (1994) seems to see religious reasons as the only motivation for home education in his writing on how to assess achievement. Stevens (2001) portrays home educators as as a dichotomy of 'believers' and 'inclusives'. Mayberry (1989) instead sees religious considerations as one of four key motivating factors, the others being academic, socio-relational and a New Age lifestyle. In looking at those families who choose home education for socio-relational reasons she argues that many are not anti-school in the way that they are often perceived to be, but instead are what she terms 'pro-home'. Mayberry describes home educating families as belonging to one or other of her four categories rather than having a variety of motives.

Echoing Mayberry's identification of multiple motivating factors, but challenging her strict categorisation, some more recent studies of parents' motivations have seen religion decline in importance and a viewpoint emerge that sees families as having multiple reasons for choosing home education. Brabant et al (2003) found that, while religion may be a contributory factor to the decision to home

educate for Quebecois families, it was not seen by home educators as the key reason for keeping their children out of school with issues such as objection to the school system and the wish to provide children with an enhanced curricular and social experience being of greater importance.

Family lifestyle and the importance of an individualised learning experience for children also emerge as important factors in the decision to home educate. Both Brabant et al (2003) and Collom (2005) cite family lifestyle and the wish to continue children's education as an integral part of family life as a key motivation for home educating among a significant number of families studied. On an anecdotal level both Schinas' (2005) and Mullarney's (1983) accounts of home educating illustrate home education as integral to maintaining some lifestyles, either in remote areas in a constant state of transience. Home education in these cases becomes a lifestyle choice as much as an educational one.

Unlike the majority of research that looks only at families' initial reasons for undertaking home education, Van Galen's research argues that motivations for home educating change over time, particularly for those families who start from a stance that is uncritical of conventional school structures. She describes families as engaging in 'political pedagogy' as they challenge conventional interpretations of education and schooling. Although this aspect of home educators' motivations has been little considered by other researchers, it is supported by the findings of Thomas (1998) and Collom (2005) who found that families' perceptions of home education changed over time.

Parents' motivations in home educating are intertwined with their attitudes towards school and state. There appears to be no specific research examining these attitudes of home educating parents, although Petrie (1992, 1998) and, more recently, Ofsted (2010) have looked at the attitudes of state authorities towards home educators. However, popular literature on home education plays a significant role in creating what seems to be a dominant discourse around the relationship between home educating families and the state. In the form of numerous small magazines, popular journals, newsletters, websites and 'how to' books as well as autobiographical accounts of home education, it can be argued that such literature, in creating a dominant discourse around authorities' attitudes to home education, consequently shapes the attitudes of parents towards both the state and the concept of school-based education.

This discourse appears to be one which is dominated by a theme of persecution and the threat of an over-surveillant, interfering state which frequently crosses the boundary between the public sphere and the sanctity of the private sphere of the family which is seen to be the space within which children primarily exist. Within this discourse schools and the formal education system are positioned as tools of the state through which surveillance and restriction are imposed. Titles of popular accounts of home education such as *Free-range Education* (Dowty 2000), *Bound to Be Free* (Fortune-Wood 2001) and *Children in Chancery* (Baker 1964) are powerful purveyors of such a message.

Within this discourse of persecution schools are assumed to be controlling environments focussed on the socialisation of children into compliant citizens and workers (Fortune-Wood 2001, Meighan 2001, Fitz-Claridge 2006). Steps by the state to regulate home education in any way, for example by instituting a

registration system for home educators are therefore portrayed as hostile and a means of the state retricting the freedom of home educators, often as a first step to eliminating home education (Education Otherwise 2010, AHED 2011, Annette 2007). Although, apart from references to Illich (1971), there is no explicit mention of academic social or educational theory, such a discourse echoes the writings of neo-Marxists in the Sociology of Education such as Bowles & Gintis (1976) with their 'long shadow of work' and also Althusser's (1972) construction of schools as Ideological State Apparatuses, part of a broader repressive establishment aiming to achieve reproduction of a compliant workforce.

In contrast to an oppressive state and school system, home education is portrayed as a freeing practice which enables children to learn independently and with freedom of thought. Such portrayals attempt to construct home education as a form of critical pedagogy with similarities to the ideas of writers such as Freire (1993), hooks (1994) and Allman (2001). This view of home education as a potential form of critical pedagogy is also raised by Van Galen's (1988) description of home education as 'political pedagogy'.

In creating such constructions of schooling versus home education, both popular and pro-home education academic literature model a discourse of persecution for home educators. Within this discourse the very nature of the liberated pedagogical models of the home educator entails conflict with the aims of the state as embodied in the formal education system and such conflict entails the persecution of home educators by a state intent on the conformity and obedience of its subjects. Proposed legislation in 2010 as part of a Children and Families Bill would have seen closer monitoring and compulsory

registration of home educated children by local authorities[10] following two highly publicised cases of child abuse (including the death of one child) where those children had also been withdrawn from school. Many home educators (or the organisations and activists that claimed to represent them) saw such a move as indicating a governmental wish to restrict their right to home educate their children and as heralding an increase in persecution of home educators and there were sustained campaigns against the legislation, with groups such as Education Otherwise and AHED acting as pressure groups. Such suspicion and organised resistance to any change or even examination of the status of home educators has been a response to government proposals or guidelines relevant to home education in the past ten years.

The discourse of persecution appears to vary slightly in its construction between different types of home educator. The form described above is predominantly found in the literature of home educators who are in favour of a child-led/autonomous form of home education. Although there is little literature on them in England and Wales, those who home educate for religious reasons tend to construct the moral values of schools as questionable and persecution as being centred around their right to religious freedom, with home education as an expression of that religious freedom (Farris 1997, Richards 2007).

Despite the negative view put forward by popular home education literature, home educators' actual relationships with authorities have varied. However, the indication is that LAs and other institutions have become more open towards home educators as awareness of home education and its legal status has grown (Dowty 2000). Although some LAs recognise that children may not

10 These proposals were abandoned due to lack of time before the 2010 general election

follow a strict school-style curriculum and time-table, many still require details more appropriate to a classroom setting when registering families and judging the 'effectiveness' of their education (Dowty 2000, Petrie 1992, Lowden 1994, Ofsted 2010). Petrie's (1992) research appears to be the only independent detailed study of LEAs' attitudes towards home education, finding that, while attitudes depended to a great extent on individual officials, open conflict was relatively rare and that very few cases had ever reached the stage of being heard by the courts. This picture of an uneasy but generally positive relationships between LAs and individual home educators is supported by Ofsted's (2010) more recent findings. Rothermel (2003) does, however, suggest that there is increasing official suspicion of and hostility towards home educating families.

Petrie's research focussed on the perspectives of LEAs and their officials and it was not until Ofsted's (2010) report that there was any research examining the relationship from the perspective of home educating families. Information on home educating families' experiences of negotiations and interactions with the authorities gleaned from accounts given in the popular literature on home education is therefore helpful in illuminating the brief account given by Ofsted. Bendell (1987) gives a comprehensive account of the changing relationship with her LEA over a period of several years. After an initial period of suspicion of her intentions, Bendell and her family seem to have established a positive relationship with individual officials. Port's (1989) case study of the Lees family's decision to home educate describes a similar development of the relationship from hostility and suspicion to tolerance and even a certain degree of support. It must be noted though, that the case of the Lees family was further

complicated, and the level of hostility raised, by the intervention of the family's doctor in the process and by poor communication between different officials.

It must be remembered when examining the relationships of home educators with LEAs and other authorities, that there is no legal compulsion on families to register their intention to home educate with their LEA unless they are withdrawing their child from a state-maintained school. It is therefore to be noted that there may be many home educating families in the UK who have had little or no contact with the authorities regarding their children's education. It must also be remembered that the stories most likely to appear in the popular literature on home education or in the media are perhaps those that highlight difficulties with the authorities as there is often little of popular interest to be written about a smooth or non-existent relationship with the 'other' that is represented by the LEAs.

From the literature it seems that, where LAs and their officials become familiar with the concept of home education, their attitudes towards it become more favourable over time, with the attitudes of individual LA officers being more important than those of the LA as a body (Ofsted 2010). However, it appears that very few, if any LAs offer home educating families practical support and advice, and that the more self-sufficient a home educating family appears to be the more likely they are to be viewed favourably by the authorities (Dowty 2000, Petrie 1992, Port 1989, Ofsted 2010).

Although the vast majority of writing on home education is written from a favourable (and often uncritical) perspective, home education and the home education movement also has its critics. Concurrent with the characterisation of

home education as a postmodern movement (Neuman, Aviram 2003), home education is often seen as a highly individualistic solution to widespread problems with conventional (particularly state-funded) schooling. Both Lubienski (2003) and Apple (2000) see the growth of home education as a worrying indication of growth in individualism which they see as a threat to the cohesion of society. Kozol puts this point across effectively when talking about the tendency of the free-school movement to produce isolated middle class schools:

> "The beautiful children do not wish cold rooms or broken glass, starvation, rats or fear for anybody; nor will they stake their lives, or put their bodies on the line, or sacrifice one moment of the golden afternoon, to take a hand in altering the unjust terms of a society in which these things are possible." (Kozol 1982 : 19)

Home education can therefore be seen as a retreat and an individualised solution to a mass problem. Apple (2000), Lubienski (2003) and Reich (2002a) argue that, because of its high economic and time costs for parents, home education is predominantly the preserve of the middle classes and they argue that in seeking a short term solution for the perceived and real problems of school-based education they withdraw from the arena of debate and influence over schools. Apple (2000) argues strongly that, given the socio-economic characteristics of home educating families,[11] in withdrawing from the state education system they are also withdrawing their considerable financial, social

11 The socio-economic characteristics are assumed by Apple to be those of white, affluent, middle-class, religiously conservative families – as we have already seen, there are no reliable figures on the socio-economic status of home educating families.

and political influence from the system and thereby decreasing the possibility of effective reforms. Such criticisms are also made of those parents who choose to send their children to private schools, thereby also withdrawing them from the state-maintained sector (Brighouse 2000, Walford 1990).

On the other hand, Tooley (2000) sees such an exit from the state education sector as a positive move, arguing that families' departures from the school system will act as a indicator to those running the education system of the need for reform. Such arguments are, however, countered by Lubienski (2003) who points out that as many home educating families never send their children to school in the first place and because many home educating families around the world are not registered with education authorities, the loss of home educating families' support for the education system is often not registered and almost certainly does not have the political weight that some would attribute to it.

As well as being individualistic, Apple (2000) also associates the growth of home education (especially amongst the religious right) as an indication of growing anti-statist sentiment. While Apple argues that state mechanisms are imperfect and can themselves be a source of inequalities, he also argues that the state has to a great extent afforded some measure of equality and opportunity to socially disadvantaged groups in terms of access to education and other benefits. Contrary to Tooley, Apple and also Reich (2002a) argues that the state supplies such benefits more efficiently than the market ever could and that anti-statist and individualistic movements, including the home education movement put the benefits of the state system in jeopardy.

Both Lubienski (2003) and Apple (2000) therefore argue that the growth of the home education movement is likely to have an overwhelmingly negative impact upon the state education system (after all, as Tooley (2000) acknowledges, it does not operate as a true market with true freedom of choice and of entry and exit). Lubienski (2003) argues that the 'flight' of economically and politically powerful families from the state education system will lower incentives for improvement of the system and will instead lead to the amplification of social inequalities, with socio-economically disadvantaged children condemned to poor schools, while more privileged children benefit from individualised education and private resourcing within private and home education.

For other authors, the growth of home education simply represents the establishment of another choice option in the growing marketisation of schools and the operation of choice mechanisms (Aurini, Davies 2005, Stevens 2003). In this context, home education is seen as one more competitor in the market and another force which will encourage school-based education to improve in quality while also offering choice for those who wish to educate their children otherwise.

It is questionable what effect home education will have upon school-based education in reality – as Lubienski (2003) points out, ideas and practices that are successful in home education are difficult to transfer to the very different environment of the classroom and often there is a lack of communication between the two spheres. Also, as Holt (Holt 1981) admits, similar visions of total change for education were held within the alternative Free School movement of the 1960s and 1970s, a movement which has since disappeared leaving almost no trace of its original high ideals and hopes.

Having examined the attitudes and relationship of home educators to the state in general, I now turn to look at their attitudes and relationships to schools. Education has become an increasingly key part of childhood, with formal education starting earlier and earlier in England and Wales. The Foundation Stage of the National Curriculum now encompasses non-compulsory pre-school education, with checklists of skills children should acquire from birth onwards. It is therefore inevitable that involvement in their children's education should become an increasingly a part of the mothering role. There is also extensive evidence that the extent of parental[12] involvement in a child's education has a significant impact upon educational attainment (Reay 1998, Ball, Bowe et al. 1997, Allatt 1993). As a result, while there is little research into the experiences and attitudes of home educating parents in England and Wales towards schooling, there is a significant body of research into the attitudes and relationships of parents generally, and mothers specifically, to schools and their children' s schooling.

Reay's (Reay 1998, Reay, Ball 1998, Reay 1996) research suggests that the majority of mothers, whatever their social class and educational background, are supportive of and involved in their children's education, wanting their children to do well at school as well as to enjoy their experiences of school (although the concepts of 'happiness' and 'success' in education vary with social class (West, Noden 2003)). Mothers' support and concern for their children's education as well as their construction of themselves as experts on their children (Miller 2005) can however lead them into conflict with education

12 The frequent conflation of parental and maternal roles and the uncritical assumption of the gendered nature of the former is common in literature on parents and education (Stambach, David 2005, Hughes, Burgess et al. 1991) and is addressed in more detail in the following chapter.

professionals . Reay and others (Landeros 2011, Rogers 2007) describe mothers' frustration when they felt that their children's individual needs were not being met within school, either socially and emotionally or academically. Middle class mothers tend to find such negotiations with professionals easier to navigate due to their greater possession of social and cultural capital, and therefore have a greater sense of power and entitlement with regards to their children's education, whilst mothers from less advantaged backgrounds and with less understanding and experience of the workings of the school system were more likely to feel 'brushed off' and their concerns ignored.

Despite a public mantra of 'choice' in education, parents' choices for their children's schooling within the state-maintained sector are often restricted[13]. School preferences are often based upon little real knowledge, rather upon word of mouth and reputation (Gorard 1997). Parents in possession of significant amounts of economic capital may make use of this to secure a 'better' education for their children, either through moving house to the catchment area of a 'good' school or through purchasing a private school place for their child, although again such judgements are often based on limited evidence.

There is evidence that mothers of children with special educational needs (SEN) find themselves negotiating a particularly difficult relationship with their children's schools (Rogers 2007). Mothers of children with SEN often find that they need to expend extraordinary effort in order to obtain the support within school that their children need, or that they believe that their children need.

13 And choice within the private sector (accounting for less than 10% of children in England and Wales) usually depends on the possession of significant financial capital, making it out of reach for most families

Gaining SEN provision, whether it is extra support in the classroom of a mainstream school or a place at a specialist school often requires mothers to engage with a wide range of professionals and to display specialist knowledge of the SEN system. Parents have to draw on social, cultural and economic capital to gain desired outcomes for their children as the publication of guides for parents to negotiating assistance such as *Surviving the special educational needs system : how to be a 'velvet bulldozer'* (Row 2005) show. Parents often use the term 'fight' to describe their engagement with professionals and authorities and their battles can be lengthy with it often taking years for parents to be satisfied that they have obtained the help and educational provision their children need (Rogers 2007). This notion of conflict and difficulty contained in the word 'fight' is very different to the picture portrayed by the common use of the term 'partnership' by educational institutions to describe their ideas about their relationship with parents (Rogers 2010).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to the notion of home education and to its legal and research status both in England and Wales and the broader worldwide context. Home education is a phenomenon which appears to be growing in popularity in England and Wales and yet about which relatively little is known. This lack of knowledge relates to the characteristics and numbers of a population, many of whom choose to remain hidden from view of the authorities. It also relates to the lack of rigorous academic research on home education, which is instead often substituted with pseudo-academic research

which does not critically engage with either home education or its wider social context.

In itself, this lack creates both a context and rationale for this thesis, establishing its role in contributing both to academic knowledge of home education and to placing home education within a broader social context.

In addition to the limited academic literature on home education in England and Wales there is an extensive body of popular literature which I have drawn upon to frame and inform my inquiry. As Dunne (2011) argues, familiarity with both the research field and the surrounding literature helps the researcher to frame relevant questions which are sensitive to the research setting. In this context, international literature on home education, especially that which critically questions the role and nature of home education in a broader social context, also serves to suggest possibilities and areas of enquiry with regard to home education in England and Wales.

As this chapter has shown, there appears to be little consensus as to the motivations of home educators, except to separate those who are religiously motivated from other home educators. What does, however, emerge from the literature, especially from the popular literature on home education in England and Wales, is a discourse of persecution which surrounds home educators attitudes towards and interactions with the state and the school system. This discourse of persecution is promulgated through the popular literature on home education, and its possible effects are noted in the findings of reports such as that by Ofsted (2010) and Hopwood et al (2007) which record home educators' attitudes towards Local Authorities.

The discourse of persecution is linked to an attitude towards the state, also promoted in popular home education literature that views the state as coercive and interfering, making use of neo-Marxist language in its description of schools as tools of a repressive state. Actual data on home educators' attitudes to school and state seems to be almost non-existent and I have therefore drawn heavily on broader contextual literature regarding the relationship of parents to schools and education more generally.

Having established the background to home education in England and Wales and raised questions about its context in terms of home educators' relationships to the state and school-based education, the next chapter turns to home education itself. I examine existing understandings of the process of home education with regard to home educators' models and practices of the home education process and explore the literature regarding the family relationships around which home education centres.

2 Principles and Practice

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the background and status of home education and home education research and explored the relationships of home educators to the state and the school system. Building on this understanding, this chapter moves on to look at the core actors in home education and the day-to-day processes of home education. These are areas in which there is significantly less available literature specifically around home education and I therefore draw upon broader literatures in the fields of childhood and motherhood, as well as literature around the relationship between parents and education.

Part of this process involves addressing critically the notions of 'mothering' and 'parenting'; terms which are often unproblematically viewed as interchangeable both within home education literature and in broader literature surrounding childhood and the sociology of education. Evidence suggests that mothers are the dominant actors in the process of home education and therefore that the gendered division of labour in home education, and also more broadly around childcare and domestic labour, needs to be considered.

I start by looking at the interrelation of constructions of childhood and motherhood and their relationship within home education. Along with the attitudes towards state and schools discussed in the previous chapter, these constructions form the basis for home educators' models and practices in home educating. I then turn to those models and practices, examining both the theoretical roots of home educators' pedagogical models and what is known

about the ways in which they translate those ideals into the day-to-day practice of home education.

Finally I turn to the question of mothers' experiences in home educating, something which my thesis seeks to address, and about which there is very little existing knowledge. This section therefore lays some limited foundations for the findings of my research.

Childhood, Motherhood and Home Education

Motivations of religion, family, lifestyle and attitudes to the state discussed in the previous chapter affect, and are affected by, home educators' notions and constructions of childhood. These constructions, in turn, are influenced by dominant constructions of childhood in contemporary society. Current constructions of childhood and the parent-child relationship can be traced back to the social changes that took place in the mid-19th Century as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution. The separation of home from the work place, the resulting privatisation of the family, the removal of children from factory work and the institution of compulsory education, alongside the rise of the middle-class ideology of the mother as the 'Angel in the House' were all significant. Over a period of 75 to 100 years children were effectively removed from the public sphere and home and school became seen as the appropriate site of childhood (Gittins 2004, Aries 1962). Children were thereby excluded from participation in wider society, socially, economically and politically (Davin 1999, Lee 2005).

The restriction of children to the 'safety' of the private sphere has been concomitant with what has been termed a “being/becoming” dichotomy upon which the dominant view of childhood rests (Smart, Neale et al. 2001, Lee 2001). In this model adults are seen as completed human beings, therefore having a right to participate fully in society. Children on the other hand are seen as socially, physically and cognitively incomplete, and are therefore restricted from participation in the public sphere. As sociologists of childhood have elaborated, physical immaturity has often been equated with social and moral incompetence (Smart, Neale et al. 2001, Lee 2001, Mayall 1996, Kehily 2004).

Children are therefore regarded as incompetent (being unable to carry out 'adult' tasks and bear 'adult' responsibilities and choices), and innocent (of the problems and 'evils' of society). This incompetence and innocence means that children are also constructed as vulnerable, needing protection from wider society and requiring specialised guidance to ensure their correct development. 'Incorrect' socialisation gives children immense potential to pose danger to society (Gittins 2004, Buckingham 2000, Prout 2005).

The construction of childhood as a vulnerable and risky state has also led to the development of a range of highly specialised roles and agencies designed to deal with different areas of children’s lives and bring about their correct development and socialisation (Moss, Petrie 2002). One such institution is education and the development of formalised, school-based education and its lengthening over time, has been a direct means of lengthening childhood (Aries 1962, Jeffs 2002, Lee 2005). Education has therefore come to be seen as part of the “becoming” process for children in addition to the socialisation process that takes place within the family. Education is also viewed as the means to

prepare children for an economically productive adult life; economic contribution to society being constructed as part of being fully human and competent (Lee 2001, Prout 2005).

The view of childhood as a both crucial and vulnerable stage of the life course is often drawn into home educators' rationales for home educating. Literature on religious home educators indicates a strong concern for the appropriate moral development of their children, with childhood seen as a crucial time for the creation of a moral framework and home education therefore a means of protecting children from absorbing 'wrong' values (Richards 2007, Stevens 2001). Other home educators seek to protect their vulnerable children from corruption and coercion by the state through the school system; Jeffs (2002), Fortune-Wood (2007, 2005a) and the philosophy of Taking Children Seriously (Fitz-Claridge 2006, Friedman 2003) all emphasise home education as a means of avoiding harm to children from coercion within schools.

Growth into useful and secure adulthood is therefore seen as the chief aim and purpose of childhood, with education as a key tool in that process. This perspective has been linked to Durkheimian and Parsonian theories of socialisation in which the child is the object of socialisation and the adult the one who brings about suitable socialisation, the agency belongs to the competent adult while the child is regarded (to use Freire's (1993) critique of what he terms the 'banking model' of education) as an empty vessel in need of filling and completing (Kehily 2004). Parents, in particular mothers, have been constructed within this view of childhood as an incomplete state, as holding the key responsibility for socialising their children appropriately and the assumption

in England and Wales is that this socialisation by mothers will be overseen by various state institutions such as the NHS and the school system (Miller 2005).

A result of the construction of children as vulnerable and education as crucial to their development is that as well as debates surrounding the impact of home education upon wider society, there are also concerns about the impact of home education upon the home educated child. School attendance has become a social norm, and as well as being seen as a place in which children receive education school is also seen as a key point of socialisation for young children: learning how to interact with peers and also to obey authority (Parsons 1961, Brint 2006). There is therefore concern that children who do not attend school will not be properly socialised into the norms and values of society (Lubienski 2003, Monk 2003), although some home educators would argue that this is precisely why they choose to home educate, in order to avoid socialisation that they object to (Mayberry 1989, Thomas 1998, Van Galen 1988). Lubienski (2003) argues that the isolation of children within the home, as well as leading to generally poor socialisation, isolates children from social inequalities and exposure to the different values and experiences of different social groups, meaning that as they grow up children lack the skills and awareness to deal with people different from themselves and to confront social inequalities. On the other hand, such isolation from social inequalities and exposure to a narrowly defined set of values and cultures is not a phenomenon unique to home education; it is, for example, precisely what many parents aim for in choosing a private school for their children (Walford 1990, Allatt 1993, West, Noden 2003, Kenway 1990). There is also significant evidence that state-funded schools are often socially segregated with middle class parents

engineering school choices according to the desired social milieu of the school (Reay, Ball 1998, Ball 2003). Lubienski (2003) also seems to assume that home education takes place solely within the confines of the home and the family, although both studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that for many home educating families there is interaction with a wide range of people (both in age and socio-cultural terms) beyond the home, helping children adapt to the social requirements of day-to-day life (Dowty 2000, Meighan 1995, Webb 1989, Rothermel 2000).

In an extension of concerns about the effects of home education upon the child, Lubienski (2003), Reich (2002a, 2005) and Apple (2001) also argue that, in choosing home education for their children, ostensibly to promote choice and freedom (either religious or social), home educators may actually restrict their children's opportunities to make choices. Lubienski, Apple and Reich all argue that as these parents exercise their choices they isolate their children from knowledge of cultures and values other than those of their immediate family and chosen social circle, thereby removing their children's capacity for freedom of choice either as children or later as adults. This leads to a debate over the balance between the parental right to choose children's educations versus the child's right to receive education. In order to understand this debate, it is necessary to relate it to broader changes in conceptions of childhood and the broader debate around children's rights.

Rapid and extensive social change over the past thirty years has changed our conceptions of adulthood and therefore opened the way for a re-examination of childhood. Many of the old assumptions about childhood, however, retain dominance in popular culture meaning that childhood has become a site of

conflict, with controversy over what childhood 'should' look like and over child-rearing practices. According to some sociologists, adulthood can no longer be seen as a stable, complete and unchanging state (Buckingham 2000, Prout 2005). The rapid development of technology and its incursions into everyday life (for example mobile 'phones, mp3 players and home computing) and changes to the occupational structure in England and Wales have meant that adults as well as children are constantly learning and developing new skills and competencies (Postman 1983). Such learning is not just about technical skills, but also about evolving social interactions. These changes have also extended to the private sphere where, for example, changing social attitudes mean that marriage, traditionally a symbol of adult 'completion' is increasingly neither a social expectation, nor seen as an end, again questioning the ‘completed’ state of adulthood (Smart, Neale et al. 2001, Buckingham 2000).

The lessening of the security of adulthood and its increasingly blurred boundaries with childhood, as children gain access to previously adult domains of knowledge, has led to propositions about the “death of childhood” (Postman 1983). This debate, which has been seized upon by the media and brought into the public domain, particularly centres upon the perceived loss of childhood “innocence” and has been linked to fears about the dangers (social, physical and economic) of inappropriately socialised and uncontained young people who may pose a threat to social order (Kehily 2004). Public and political expression of such fears can be seen in the creation of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), predominantly aimed at young people, and also the public and media reaction to cases such as the murder by young boys of the toddler Jamie Bulger (Kehily 2004), as well as media reactions to the 2011 riots in England. At a

more mundane level, concerns and fears about childhood are expressed in a plethora of parenting books, including popular social-psychology books such as Palmer's *Toxic Childhood* (2006) or *21st Century Boys* (2009). Buckingham (2000), however, argues that a view of childhood as 'dying' relies upon developmental and westernised notions of childhood. In positing the disappearance of childhood it is assumed that childhood can only take one, narrowly defined, form rather than recognising that much of our conception of childhood is socially constructed and that changing childhood is a feature of past, present and future. Associated with colonial attitudes, children have been seen as comparable to ‘less civilised’ people groups, with their lack of social and economic competencies barring them from full participation in society (Prout 2005). This leaves us with a peculiarly Western notion of childhood and the assumption that other constructions and manifestations of childhood are ‘abnormal’ and somehow lacking. Indeed, Gittins (2004) argues that the dominant construction of childhood is based upon white, male, middle-class ideals which have been extended to include all children both male and female in all sectors of society, thus rendering abnormal other manifestations and practices of childhood:

> "The concept of childhood as it developed was historically and class specific, while at the same time disguising both gender and class differences. The term suggests all childhoods are equal, universal and in some way fundamentally identical: it disguises more than it reveals and denies the fact that the meanings and assumptions inherent in it (innocence, dependency) were constructed by a certain social group at a

> certain point in time, but later used to define what all families and childhoods should be." (p.35).

Fears for childhood as an institution which conforms to dominant construction, and therefore for children as individuals, can be linked to the 'pro-home' attitudes of some home educators, as identified by Mayberry (1989). In restricting their children's choices Apple (2000) and Lubienski (2000) argue that parents are seeking to protect their children from the unpredictability of modern social life by keeping them within the safety of the private sphere of the family.

Along with changing forms of childhood, the blurring of adult/child boundaries has also been associated with the development of the children's rights movement (Lee 2005, Prout 2005). This has been embodied in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which frames children's rights separately from those of their parents and challenges the assumption that a parent exercising their rights will always act in the best interests of the child (Burr 2004, Monk 2004a). The UNCRC also brings into consideration the child as an agent, giving children the right to have their views on topics heard, particularly in respect to decisions about their own lives. However, in a perspective that can be interpreted either as an acknowledgement of the social construction of childhood (Monk 2004a), or as a failure to give the convention real consequence (Burr 2004), the interpretation of the convention and its application is left to individual states, who decide at what age a child becomes capable of making informed judgements and therefore worthy of having their voice heard.

As well as the broader critiques of home education and its consideration in the light of children's rights discussed above, the question of 'rights', 'choice' and the effects of home education on children is one that is raised by Monk (2003, 2004b) and Reich (2002b). Monk argues that the right of the parent to choose the education of their child is not absolute, but that it must be balanced both against the needs of the child and also against the broader communal functions of education. Again, while Monk problematises the conflation of education with schooling, he raises the concept of education's social functions in creating children as socialised beings and cites the precedence of one particular legal case surrounding home education in Germany. Monk's argument is that while parents who wish to home educate cite their right of parental choice, there also needs to be consideration of the child's right to education, although this raises a host of conceptual and practical issues regarding the question of what 'education' actually is and how it is best provided.

This balance between the rights of parents and children within home education and the ways in which such rights and perceptions of rights relate to motivations to home educate highlights the location of home education at the nexus of the parent-child relationship. It is to the mother-child relationship within home education and the concept of maternal involvement in education that I now turn. In tandem with the view of childhood as an incomplete state, parents, particularly mothers, have been constructed as holding the key responsibility for ensuring the appropriate socialisation of their children. The assumption in England and Wales is that this socialisation by mothers will be overseen and participated in by various institutions such as the health service and the school system.

One of the few academically rigorous pieces of writing which connects home education and gender is that by Stambach and David (2005) which examines the gendered nature of portrayals of home education and their role in reproducing and reinforcing traditional family structures. David's groundbreaking work in the 1980s and 1990s on relations between school and home focused significantly on gender issues. This work put motherhood at the forefront of debates and highlighted a significant absence of attention in the rhetoric around the gender neutral term of 'parenting' (see for example West, Noden et al. 1998, New, David 1985). Her work (with Stambach) on home education provides an important critical view on motherhood and home education in the US, aspects of which can be directly applied to the situation in England and Wales.

Stambach and David argue that “The absence of gender as a focussed subject naturalizes women and men as 'equal' parents, when in fact they have different histories of engagement within families and public education.” (Stambach, David 2005, p.1637). They identify this absence of gender as present in much of the popular and academic literature surrounding home education and argue that this assumption of 'maternal parenting' reinforces both 'liberal feminist ideas of professionalism and motherhood' and traditional expressions of two-parent families in which the division of labour is gendered.

It appears that home education is predominantly the preserve and the work of mothers. Writing on home education in its US context by Apple (2006), Stevens (2001), Lois (2010, 2009, 2006) and Stambach and David (2005) identifies home education as in the main carried out and controlled by mothers.

There is no corresponding academic identification of gender roles in home education in England and Wales, however autobiographical popular literature on home education, such as that by Baker (1964), Bendell (1987), Mullarney (1983) and Schinas (2005) appears to be exclusively written by mothers and, although predominantly child-focussed in its content, it gives accounts of home education from mothers' perspectives. Other literature, both academic and popular seems to draw predominantly upon the accounts of mothers to construct accounts of home education. Even where it is identified, the gendered nature of home education is often not problematised (see for example Stevens 2001) with the terms 'parent' and 'mother' being used interchangeably, or, as with McDowell's (2000) work on home educating mothers, seems to assume that home education is carried out universally by mothers.

Parallels to these assumptions about the roles of mothers in education can also be found in the literature on mainstream schooling. Landeros (2011) notes that the term 'parents' is used with an assumption to mean 'mothers', echoing the earlier findings of Hughes et al (1991), Reay (1998) and West et al (1998) that mothers rather than fathers are expected to be involved in their children's education on a day-to-day basis.

Although motherhood and fatherhood can both be considered subcategories of parenthood, they tend to construct that parenthood role in very different ways. As home education appears to be an enterprise where mothers undertake the majority of the day-to-day labour, it is important here to consider the dominant constructions of the motherhood role in order to understand how home education impacts upon and is impacted upon by such constructions.

Motherhood is a relational role created through the relationship of a woman to her child and the dominant ideology of 'intensive mothering' constructs the role of mother around the constructions of childhood already discussed. The dominant construction of children as vulnerable and in a process of critical formation and socialisation therefore means that motherhood is constructed predominantly as a responsibility and mothers are constructed as carers with expectations that they will place their children's needs above their own (Miller 2005, Hays 1998, Gatrell 2008).

Mothers generally take responsibility both for children's day to day care (feeding, clothing, physical health) and also for their socialisation and equipping for adulthood. When socialisation and equipping is seen to have been ineffective and children are deemed deviant it is frequently the parenting that children have received that is seen to be at fault and, although notions of 'good' parenting and 'good' parents are often discussed, as New and David note, such discussions quickly become gendered:

> "But if we try to understand what we mean by the term 'parent', it quickly becomes difficult not to give it a sex. There is almost no such relationship at present in our society as the parent-child relationship. The responsibilities of being a parent are gendered. As we shall see, being a mother is, in fact, very different from being a father. … 'Mothering', ... is about the daily physical and social tasks. These differences are obscured in the word 'parent'." (New, David 1985, p.133)

Despite changes in gender roles and child care over the past 20 years since New and David wrote, the majority of day-to-day care and socialisation of children is still assumed to be a feminine role, both as an ideal and in practice (Miller 2005, Landeros 2011, Hays 1998, Gatrell 2008). Whilst, according to dominant ideas of 'good' motherhood, child-rearing is ideally carried out within the home by the child's own mother, childcare outside the home is also provided by predominantly female carers even into the early years of school-based education. The vast majority of childminders, daycare staff and primary (particularly infant) teachers are female. Childcare, both inside and outside the home remains a strongly gendered activity linked to biologically deterministic notions of women's mothering roles (Miller 2005, Gatrell 2008, Bobel 2001).

As Miller (2005) and Gatrell (2008) note, ideals of motherhood, even in the 21st Century, can be traced back to Victorian middle-class notions of the 'angel in the house' associated with the rise of the middle class during the industrial revolution and the creation of what is still today held as the ideal-type nuclear family of father, mother and children. As well as being gendered therefore, ideal-types of motherhood also tend to be very strongly classed and associated with the possession of values and cultural, social and economic capital associated with the middle-classes. Stambach and David (2005) argue that for middle class mothers home education builds upon and reinforces these traditional family roles by bringing mothers' roles, even as they take on the professional role of educators, within the domestic sphere. This argument is supported by Lois' (Lois 2009) findings about the ways in which home educating mothers justify their choice of home education by drawing upon traditional middle-class discourses of motherhood and childhood.

Just as childhood has been confined to the private space of the home and children restricted from full participation in society, motherhood and mothering are therefore also defined by the private/public divide. Mothering is idealised as a primarily home-based and therefore private task. Focussed as it is around childhood, mothering by its very nature becomes the preserve of the private sphere (Gatrell 2008).

Despite the responsibility entrusted to mothers to raise the 'next generation' and the approbation for mothers who are seen to have failed in their roles, mothering work has a low status in society (Benn 1998). The labour of mothering is unwaged and mothers either therefore find themselves working a 'second shift' (Hochschild, Machung 1990) in paid work or becoming economically dependent either upon a waged partner or the state[14]. Breen and Cooke (2005) argue that this dependence is cyclical with women's emotional investment in motherhood and the domestic sphere perpetuating their dependency upon male partners and the gendered division of labour within partnerships. By situating mothering work as unwaged it is automatically deemed to be of a lower status than paid work which makes a tangible financial contribution to the economy and to society (Gatrell 2008) (although women themselves may perceive their work differently and as being of higher value (Taylor, Bennett et al. 2010)). The value and contribution of mothering work is not included in a country's GDP nor in any day-to-day economic calculations. This lack of perceived value in mothering work is also reflected in state encouragement to mothers to enter the paid work-force with the provision of

14 Economic dependency of mothers upon the state tends to be frowned upon socially as well as by the state (witness recent government policies aimed at encouraging lone parents into the paid workforce earlier in their children's lives), drawing again upon traditional middle-class values of the nuclear family as an economically independent unit.

child care funding, tax credits and recent proposals to reduce state benefits to lone mothers not in paid employment.

This lack of social value placed upon mothering is exacerbated by the fact that such work is also often perceived as unskilled, with concurrent assumptions that it is something that all women (whether mothers or not) can and should do by virtue of their femininity. Such assumptions also serve to preserve mothering and caring as a 'naturally' female role (Miller 2005, Gatrell 2008, Duncombe, Marsden 1999).

At the same time as mothering takes place within the private sphere of the home there is also an expectation of a relationship between mothers in their private sphere and professionals in the public sphere. These professionals act as agents of the state and of society in ensuring that 'appropriate' child-rearing takes place and 'expert' knowledge therefore has a role in shaping expectations of mothers and motherhood (Miller 2005, New, David 1985, David 1999). It is to be noted that although mothering is regarded as instinctive and 'natural' and mothers are accorded low status in society, mothering is also seen as a risky process requiring an attitude of responsibility, with popular literature and the media predicting dire outcomes should children not be properly socialised (Palmer 2006). This leads to contradictory policies and attitudes towards mothers who are simultaneously seen as needing surveillance (David 1999). New and David (1985) describe the state as a helper and co-parent, implying notions of shared responsibility for the child and also shared rights over the child.

As part of this shared responsibility there is state surveillance of motherhood through the health and education systems with social services also involved where parenting is not thought to conform to dominant social expectations (Miller 2005), although these interventions are often disjointed and contradictory (David 1999). This means that whilst motherhood is conceived as a private experience, mothering is something that occurs within the private sphere of the home but is simultaneously open to public scrutiny, as noted by Wall (2001) and Bobel (2001).

Miller (2005) also describes the self-surveillance that mothers are encouraged to carry out by professionals. This comparison of self against other mothers and dominant ideas of 'good mothering' tends to lead to the suppression of negative experiences of mothering and also of women's struggles with mothering. Self-surveillance leads to an effort on mothers' parts to present themselves publicly as 'good' mothers who conform to dominant constructions of motherhood and therefore serves to perpetuate such idealised images of motherhood. This struggle for self-presentation and conformity to unattainable ideals of motherhood is noted by Lois (2009, 2006) as being particularly strong amongst home educating mothers, perhaps because of the ways in which they view and present their role as a closer fulfilment of mothering ideals than that of non-home educating mothers (Stambach, David 2005, Lois 2009, Lois 2006).

As well as being under surveillance by the state mothers are expected to engage with its institutions and Landeros (2011) and Stambach and David (2005) argue that maternal involvement children's education is a crucial part of the ongoing extension of the intensive mothering ideal. Middle-class mothers make use of their financial, social and time resources in order to invest in their

children's educational success. The desire for intense involvement in their children's education in order to fulfil the role of 'good' mother, alongside their self-portrayal as experts on their individual children can, however, lead to conflict with professionals. Landeros' (2011) research, for example describes the ways in which mothers' insistence in being involved in the classroom may interfere with the teacher's role and have a negative impact upon other students. Home education removes this tussle for control between teachers and mothers as well as assuaging mothers' guilt (noted by Landeros (2011) as a motivation for mothers' 'interference') about their failure to fulfil all the tenets of good mothering. Stambach and David therefore argue that home education, whilst it draws on feminist arguments surrounding the professionalisation of mothers' roles, also reinforces the positions and roles of mothers within the private sphere of the conventional nuclear family.

Pedagogical models and practices

Home educators' constructions of motherhood and childhood, and their inter-relation with home education, formed part of the foundations to their pedagogical models and practices in home educating, and it is to these models and practices that I now turn. As well as considering the existing research upon home education it is also important to consider the theoretical pedagogical writing that has influenced home educators. That is where this section starts, before moving on to consider the ways in which home educators translate their pedagogical ideals into the day-to-day practice of home education.

The theoretical roots of the home education movement are most closely associated with writers such as Holt and Illich, although, as we shall see, there

are other perspectives that must be considered[15]. John Holt and Ivan Illich are often hailed as the fathers of the contemporary home education movement with their critiques of school-based education. The term 'deschooling', often used to describe either a child's 'recovery' from their experiences at school or a completely unregulated, child-led approach to home education (Dowty 2000) comes from Illich's influential book *Deschooling Society* (1971).

Holt's (1984, 1981, 1967) work is written predominantly from a psychological point of view and is based upon his personal ad hoc observations both of friends' young children and of his own students during his time as a school teacher. Holt argues that conventional schooling is essentially damaging to children's innate ability to learn, by its emphasis on extrinsic rewards such as teacher approval rather than the intrinsic rewards offered by learning for its own sake.

In particular Holt asserts that teacher labelling of students by ability means that students often suffer from chronic lack of self-esteem reinforcing the need for teacher approval, rather than encouraging independent learning. In contrast, Holt argues that children who learn through both successes and mistakes without the attribution of 'failure' learn more effectively than those taught using traditional methods. Traditional didactic methods of teaching should be abandoned in favour of a child-led approach where children are presented with appropriate learning materials but left to learn at their own pace and inclination. Holt's model of home education is highly individualistic, seen in his

15 When talking about theoretical roots of home education it is primarily in reference to the more liberal forms of home education and/or to those families who home educate for pedagogical/academic reasons rather than those who home educate for religious reasons or who follow a model of 'school at home'. This is as it appears to be primarily these families who have consciously considered the theoretical and pedagogical arguments for home education (Van Galen 1988).

encouragement of parents to home educate rather than put their efforts into reforming the school system, on the basis that what they were interested in was the education of their own children rather than the education of all children (Holt 1981). Franzosa (1991) critiques this extreme level of individualism, arguing that Holt's vision of home education is unlikely to produce children who contribute positively to society:

> one was left to wonder ... how emphasis on personal autonomy and independence could allow children to eventually come to value social participation and function responsibly in associated social life; or why they would even want to be defined in Holt's terms as 'the kind of person we need in our society' (p.125)

Holt's ideas have been taken up by parts of the home education movement, primarily by those groups described by Van Galen (1988) as 'pedagogues'. These families often idealise an entirely informal child-led model of home education where children learn as, when and what they want to, entirely without coercion and with adults acting solely as facilitators for the child's learning inclinations. Often referred to in the UK as 'autonomous education', and promoted by writers such as the Fortune-Woods (2001, 2007), Fitz-Claridge (2006) and Dowty (2000), the emphasis is upon trusting the child and also upon the theory that children will quickly pick up skills including reading, writing and numeracy when they find a need for them. This emphasis on the total autonomy of the child bears strong similarities to the philosophy of A.S. Neill, as expressed in the structure of his alternative school, Summerhill (Neill 1980, Hemmings 1972, Segefjord 1970). Summerhill is run by its pupils in

cooperation with the teachers, with students having complete autonomy as to how and when they participate in school activities (including lessons). Neill's pedagogy differs, however, from that of home educators in that Neill saw parents as harmful to their children's development and therefore argues for the removal of children from the home environment from as early an age as possible (Segefjord 1970, Neill 1985).

Whereas Holt's work actively promotes the idea of home education, Illich makes no specific reference to home education. Like Holt, Illich (1971, 1976) argues that schools in their modern forms are inefficient and that much of what is classed as 'education' is in fact focussed on the dispensing of certain forms of knowledge – an idea that is similar to Freire's (1993) 'banking' model of education. Like Holt and Freire, Illich argues that current formal models of education should be discarded and that society should be 'deschooled', with conventional schools being replaced by what Illich describes as learning 'webs'. Illich's model of education is again, one that is learner-led, however, instead of being family-based, he describes a network linking learners to those who already possess the sought skills or knowledge.

Very little seems to be known about the practices of home educating families in England and Wales and therefore little is known about how families translate their pedagogical models into practice. Meighan (1995) describes their practices as 'diverse' and the popular literature on British home education describes practices, which, while extending over the full spectrum of formal to 'unschooling' described earlier, tend towards being informal and child-led (Dowty 2000, Richards 2007, Fortune-Wood 2005a, Bartholomew 2007, Scott 2006).

Thomas' study of home education in the UK and Australia and his follow-up study carried out with Pattison (2007) appear to be the only major studies to date which have examined in any depth the methods employed by home educating families in England and Wales. Thomas (1998) found that most of the families in his study began home educating with fairly formal arrangements, including timetables and formal curricula and workbooks: attempting to some extent to replicate school at home. However, over time all the families interviewed by Thomas had changed their practices, all moving towards a more informal and child-led approach, although the extent of change varied from family to family. Thomas found that families' use of formal teaching materials and methods was often a reaction to feelings of guilt imposed by the education authorities or by family and friends and acted as a nod to the conventional schooling methods which they had been socialised to accept as the norm. At other times Thomas found that formal materials were also used to make up for a lack of confidence in both parents' and children's ability to master a particular subject area (often mathematics), a response which is also evident in anecdotes of home educating families' practices (Dowty 2000).

Worldwide, the link between families' motivations in undertaking home education and their practices is one that is still under debate. Van Galen (1988) asserts that the ways in which families home educate are closely linked to their motivations and that as parents' perceptions of both home education and schools change so do their motivations in education and their methods. Others, however, claim that the diversity of motivations and practices among home educating families mean that such links cannot be made, and that in fact very

little at all can be said about home educators in general (Meighan 1995, Rothermel 2011, Rothermel 2003).

Families' pedagogical practices in home educating are commonly seen as located between two poles. At one end of the spectrum are those home educators for whom education at home takes the form of formal schooling within the home, with a set curriculum, regular testing, and a formal timetable. Such practices are more often associated with parents who home educate for religious reasons – being discontent with the curriculum content and moral menu of conventional schooling rather than school structures *per se* (Collom 2005, Thomas 1998, Van Galen 1988, Stevens 2001).

At the other end of the spectrum are 'unschoolers' or 'autonomous' home educators, who draw on the pedagogical models of Holt and Illich. In their practice there is no formal structure of education, instead children are completely in charge of their own learning through a process of natural 'discovery' according to their inclinations (Bendell 1987, Van Galen 1988). There is some indication that the vast majority of home educating families do not cluster at either end of the spectrum but instead tend to develop pedagogical practices that mix formal and informal methods of education (Thomas, Pattison 2007, Mayberry 1989, Van Galen 1988). The exact make up of that mix will vary from family to family and Thomas (1998), among others, suggests that families will also vary the formality and structure of their home education over time, with most moving towards more informal practises, although formal elements may play a more important role as children grow older and study for external examinations may be undertaken.

Families' practices in home educating their children can be linked to their constructions of childhood and the pedagogical models of families at the less formal end of the home education spectrum can be seen as challenging aspects of the dominant constructions of childhood discussed earlier. The view of children as 'becomings' has been significantly contributed to and extended by psychologically oriented developmental models (Kehily 2004). These models, such as Bowlby's attachment theory and Piaget's stages of child development were first popularised in the 1950s. These models, still dominant in much popular thinking about child-rearing, present a static and biologically deterministic view of childhood. Prout (1997) argues that the use of psychological, developmental models in our constructions of childhood has led to highly regulated conceptions of “normal” development, meaning that children are often prevented from gaining competencies at an earlier age than expected or that such competency is not seen because it is not expected. There is therefore a failure to see children as individuals, with the assumption that all children should, with 'good' parenting, develop in the same way and at the same rate[16].

In choosing child-centred and child-led forms of home education, therefore, home educators are challenging the model of a universal childhood with pre-determined rates of educational development. Instead, in contradiction to the arguments discussed earlier that home education may in fact reduce the agency of children, both in childhood and as adults, popular home education literature tends to portray children as individuals who are capable of being agents in their own lives rather than passive recipients of pre-formulated

16 This is in contrast to mothers' experiences of their children as unique individuals, as discussed later in this chapter.

educational menus (Fortune-Wood 2001, Dowty 2000, Meighan 2001, Kirkman 2005). These conceptions of children's agency and individual development draw both on mothers' constructions of their children as unique individuals (Miller 2005), and upon the pedagogical frameworks of educational approaches such as the Montessori method (Montessori Jr 1992, Hainstock 1997) and Steiner education (Steiner 1982).

In line with this rejection of dominant models of childhood and learning, existing evidence suggests that many home educating families do not see their children's education as a discrete part of their lives. Education is not restricted to formal learning activities within the home, but also takes place as part of families' everyday life both within the home and the wider community (Barratt-Peacock 2003, Thomas 1998). Van Galen (1988) portrays home education as a process of 'political engagement' with the concept of education, arguing that over time families become more critical of educational structures and systems that have previously been taken for granted. Although Van Galen does not outline in any detail the long term implications of such political engagement, such analysis from outside the system could have important implications for the school system if engagement goes beyond an individual level.

Proponents of home education, in laying out their pedagogical ideals, argue that with the growth of home education there should be greater cooperation between home educators and schools with the sharing of pedagogical ideas and practices as well as, on a more practical (and one-sided) level the sharing of materials and facilities by the schools (Mayberry 1989, de Waal, Theron 2003), something also recommended by Ofsted (2010). Meighan (1992) also writes on the merits and possibilities of 'flexi-schooling' whereby children attend school

part-time and are educated at home for the remainder of the time. This system is in use by a small number of families and entails much greater cooperation between schools and home educators as well as flexibility on the part of the school to successfully integrate children into classrooms on a part-time basis.

Both Tooley (2000) and Rothermel (2000) suggest the creation of 'open learning centres' as alternatives to, and eventually replacements for, conventional schools. The vision is that open learning centres will act as resource centres for children's home-based education, providing both material and human resources and allowing individualised learning and encouraging independent development of skills and knowledge. It is to be assumed that Meighan (1995) holds a similar vision when he talks of the “Invitational School”, although this is not something that is elaborated upon.

It is this location (and vision of the location) of home education in diverse communities surrounding the home that Barratt-Peacock (2003) focusses on. He examines the ways in which home educated children gain knowledge and are educated through their participation in and drawing upon the knowledge of established communities. This process extended children's education and was also an important source of social interactions. Barson's (2004) findings suggest that the interactions of home educators within a wider community is important, not just to the instrumental learning of home educated children, but also to anxious home educating parents who thereby learn 'how' to home educate.

Following the theme of the networks made between home educators, Neuman and Aviram identify the stages in the development of home education in a

country, with the creation of regional and national organisations (Neuman, Aviram 2003) as one of the key indicators. They argue that as numbers grow families will tend to gather together, for mutual support, and to gain political power. In the US (regarded as having the most highly developed and largest home educating population) there are several national organisations such as the Home School Legal Defence Association (HSDLA) dedicated to promoting the rights and causes of home educating families. A classic example of increasing organisation is described in Collom's (2005) study of families who were part of a Charter school set up specifically for home educated children. The children were registered pupils of the school, and received public funding, but their education remained entirely home-based with curricula and progress administered and monitored by the school. While the families participating in Collom's study had chosen a particularly organised form of home education, Collom cites statistics suggesting that their situation was not uncommon. This supports Lubienski's (2003) assertions that as home education grows families and organisations are likely to face dilemmas around a tendency towards institutionalisation driven by a wish to achieve economies of scale and standardisation of achievement.

The organisation of home educators for the sharing of resources and knowledge and also for support brings us to the consideration of the experiences of home educating mothers, addressed by the following section.

Mothers' experiences of home education

Do mothers experience home education as a duty, a chore or something in which they find pleasure? Or is it a mixture of all three? Do the ways in which

mothers experience home education affect whether or not they continue home educating their children or submit them to the school system? These are all question which this thesis seeks to address, however literature focussing specifically on parents' experiences of home education is very sparse worldwide. Only Lois (2010, 2009, 2006) focusses on maternal experiences of home education in any depth with McDowell (2000) touching briefly on mothers' sense of enjoyment in home education. Barson's (2004) study of home educators' participation in and need for home education support groups alludes to mothers' experiences, although it does not address the gendered nature of labour within home education.

The lack of literature focussing specifically upon the experiences of home educating mothers (or even 'parents') means that it is necessary to draw upon the broader field of literature upon experiences of motherhood in general[17].

Women's actual experiences of motherhood may be very different to the idealised notions which form the dominant ideal of 'intensive motherhood' (Miller 2005, Benn 1998). While many aspects of mothering may be found to be enjoyable, the self-surveillance described by Miller (2005), acts to prevent women from revealing the less rosy aspects of motherhood. This may explain the lack of literature, either anecdotal or academic, on mothers' experiences of home education and also the extreme positivity of mothers' accounts of home education[18].

Motherhood revolves around children, but also around housework and the maintenance of the home environment. Indeed studies over the years have

17 Although, as Kawash (2011) notes, there has also been a dearth in this area in the part decade.

18 See for example Richards (2007), Scott (2006), Dowty (2000)

found that much childcare is fitted around housework rather than vice-versa (Gatrell 2008, Oakley 1976). Even in couples where the division of household labour has been fairly equitable prior to the arrival of children, the assumption of a full-time (or even part-time) mothering role by one partner tends to lead to that parent also assuming the majority of household tasks, even where those tasks are unrelated to childcare. In taking on motherhood, mothers are therefore expected to perform multiple roles extending beyond the 'simple' role of mothering (Gatrell 2008, Charles, Kerr 1999, Vincent, Ball 2006). This balancing of roles can be a struggle for mothers who are under pressure to perform 'well' the role of the 'good' mother (Hays 1998, Gatrell 2008, Duerr Berrick, Gilbert 2008). Lois' research found that the division of domestic labour and therefore mothers' assumption of the majority of work within the home did not change for home educating mothers and that this led to 'burn out' and eventual resentment of fathers' more instrumental role in the family.

Benn (1998, p.234) describes motherhood and mothering as labour which is intense and absorbing in itself, although the complexity of mothering work is often forgotten within constructions of mothering as 'natural':

> Feminism must not, along with government, forget that bringing up children is a form of work; neither motherhood or fatherhood should need so much justification beyond itself. Even in its new acceptance of motherhood, feminism is, once again, urging women to be so much more.

At the same time as the participants in Lois' research constructed their mothering role as 'natural' , following the dominant ideology of intensive

mothering (Hays 1998) and reinforcing traditional models of the nuclear family (Stambach, David 2005), they also constructed their labour in home education as liberating as it provided them a professional role as well as simultaneously allowing them to fulfil their ideals of 'good' mothering (Lois 2009). This is similar to Bobel's (2001) conception of the 'bounded liberation' experienced by breastfeeding mothers, whereby non-conventional behaviour (in this case extended breastfeeding) simultaneously liberated mothers from mainstream expectations of motherhood, whilst at the same time providing a way for them to come closer to achieving those same expectations.

At the same time both home educating and non-home educating mothers of young children describe being absorbed in their children (Miller 2005, Lois 2010). By this they meant that their children consume the majority of their focus, time and energy. These attempts to fulfil the ideology of 'intensive mothering' with its ideal of a mothers' total focus upon her child/ren, means that mothers' identities and experiences become viewed and protrayed as synonymous with those of the child. Stevens (2001) notes that home educating mothers 'disappear' within their accounts of home education because of their emphasis upon the child within home education. Interestingly there do not seem to be studies on the effect of this intense form of motherhood regarding older children, instead studies of experiences of motherhood tend to focus on new mothers and the experience of becoming a mother.

Miller (2005) also found that whilst some mothers are content with this coalescence of their identity with that of their child(ren), others find it frustrating that their horizons of their expected role in society have become restricted with their lives expected to be focussed around their children and the concerns of

home-making and child-rearing. As a result many women find mothering to be monotonous work, demanding significant sacrifice on their part without what they feel to be a commensurate reward. This is also present in Lois' (2010) accounts of the temporal nature of motherhood in home education, where she examines mothers' accounts of their attempts to manage the time demands of their roles. Because mothering takes place predominantly within the private sphere of the home, mothering can also be a lonely task. Mothers spend much time alone with their children and, especially for those who were previously in skilled paid work, can find themselves isolated from the public spaces which they previously inhabited. The power of self-surveillance can also make it difficult for mothers to draw on support from others in similar situations because of a need to present the image of a confident, competent mother (Miller 2005, Wall 2001). This may account to some extent for the overwhelmingly positive accounts of home education given by mothers in popular literature. There also is a sense that the breakdown of informal support networks in the form of local communities and extended family due to social changes such as increased geographical mobility has led to an increase in mothers' loneliness and isolation. This tendency for women to find that motherhood is often a lonely role involving much hard labour has not changed significantly in the twenty years between New & David's (1985) work and that of Miller (2005).

This loss of identity, loneliness and monotony can lead to depression and also leads many women to return to paid work in some form. Recent (and older) studies suggest that significant numbers of mothers return to paid work for reasons of self-fulfilment as well as from economic necessity (Miller 2005, New, David 1985, Benn 1998, Vincent, Ball 2006). Such a decision can lead mothers

into conflict with their own constructions of ideal motherhood, especially when it comes to decisions around delegating the responsibility of child-rearing through the use of child-care (Vincent, Ball 2006), Lois (2009) argues that this is a key justifying argument for mothers when defending their choice of home education.

Whilst experiences of mothering often contain more struggles than dominant ideals of motherhood would suggest, mothers can also find substantial fulfilment in their mothering roles (Miller 2005, Benn 1998). At the same time as becoming a mother deprives women of power, involvement and influence in the public sphere they gain power in the private sphere. Mothers hold significant, almost total, power over their children. This power spans all areas of their children's lives, especially in the early years and whilst the child remains outside of the school system and mothers have control over what their children are exposed to:

> all relationships outside the nuclear family depend on that central figure, the mother. She is not only important because she is constantly present for many pre-school children, but also because, present or not, it is SHE who decides how her children's lives are patterned.
>
> (New, David 1985, p.89)

This power, as well as the intense nature of the home-based mother-child relationship means that mothers come to regard themselves as experts on their individual children and therefore on their children's needs (Miller 2005, Rogers 2007). This sense of expertise and the rejection of their child as fitting neatly to

an expected pattern of development and need can start within a few weeks of first motherhood (Miller 2005). This leads mothers to reject the advice and privileged knowledge of professionals if it does not fit with their own knowledge of their children. This is true both of mothers of children who are perceived as 'normal' as well as mothers of children with perceived special needs. In this way, the private nature of motherhood, at the same time as being restrictive, can also give mothers a form of freedom in deciding upon the needs of their children and also the appropriate ways of meeting those needs (Landeros 2011, Lois 2009, Wall 2001). Mothers therefore tend to view their children as individuals rather than regarding them in terms of the child-development models discussed earlier, although such models are frequently referred to for reassurance around the general development of their children and whether their children fit the criteria of 'normal' (Miller 2005).

Conclusion

The limited literature on the models, practices and experiences of home educators means that this thesis draws heavily upon a broader literature concerning mothers' involvement in their children's education and also in their day-to-day care. This creates a picture in which the interactions between constructions of motherhood and childhood are key.

Attempting to fulfil dominant social constructions of ideal motherhood, which involves intense labour centred around the child, motherhood becomes centred around the child as incomplete and vulnerable, whilst simultaneously being an individual in their own right. Children are therefore individuals who are traversing a critical period of their development into competent adults ready to

join the public sphere of society. Although there is no relevant literature upon the topic in England and Wales, it appears from the limited research in the US context, that home education is therefore an expression of that centring of the motherhood role upon the child, allowing mothers to focus on and control the socialisation and education of their individual children in ultimate fulfilment of their mothering role.

These constructions of childhood and the mothering role around it are reflected in the pedagogical models drawn on by home educators which tend to emphasis the unique nature of the individual child and the importance of appropriate education to develop the child towards adulthood.

Little is known about how mothers experience the process of attempting to live out their constructions and ideals of motherhood and childhood through education, with Lois' US research being the only available study that engages with the gendered nature of home education and the experiences of mothers within those gendered structures. These gaps in the literature, and therefore in the knowledge surrounding home education and the ways in which it interacts with the broader social constructions of motherhood and childhood are ones which this thesis addresses.

3 Researching Home Education: Tales from the Living Room

Introduction

The methodological design of my research grew out of the focus of my research questions upon what motivated families to home educate and how they went about home education. I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the families I was studying and to examine what I expected to be complex and diverse situations with an understanding of the meanings and interpretations brought to home education by those families. It was therefore appropriate to formulate an interpretive methodological design using qualitative research methods (Arksey, Knight 1999, Lofland, Snow et al. 2006, Bulmer 1984).

As Lofland et al (2006) point out, in order to gain an understanding of home educators' interpretations and meanings of their status as home educators I needed a research process which included substantial interaction with them. Initially the plan was to use predominantly in-depth unstructured interviews with respondents, however, early on in my fieldwork, several opportunities for observation, both participant and non-participant, presented themselves. In addition to this, prior to starting interviews I had arranged to spend a week at a large home educators' camp ('Summerfest'). These periods of observation became a core part of my fieldwork, as a way of gaining new contacts, but also, more importantly, as a way of meeting and talking to a wider range of home educating families and of gaining a deeper and broader understanding of a variety of home educating cultures and of interactions between home educators. As well as increasing the breadth of my data, the process of

triangulation served to increase the internal validity of my data and the theorising based upon it, serving the purposes of attaining both 'completeness' and 'confirmation' of data (Arksey, Knight 1999).

The addition of observation meant that, although the study was not strictly an ethnography, my methodology also benefited from drawing on ethnographic principles to gain the necessary richness of data. Spending time with home educators in their environments (immersing myself in a home educators' camp, for example) meant that those I talked to accorded me a greater measure of respect and cooperation; there was a sense that only somebody who was really interested in them would choose to spend a week in a muddy field during a wet summer. With one group, several visits to various of their group activities meant that after an initial wariness I became to some extent 'part of the furniture' with everyday life going on around me and parents openly discussing in front of and with me their problems and concerns as well as the progress their children had made. This growth of trust, as well as the use of observation in tandem with interviews meant that I was able to accumulate thick descriptive data, as described by Lofland et al, enabling me “to grasp the meanings associated with the actions of those you are studying and to understand the contexts in which those actions are embedded” (2006, p.15).

In carrying out my interviews and observations I drew upon methodological approaches put forward by feminist researchers such as Oakley (1990) in trying to create a non-exploitative relationship in which gaining participants' trust would enhance the validity and depth of my data. This approach was particularly appropriate given that many of my participants viewed themselves as vulnerable and to some extent persecuted or oppressed by society and the

formal education system (which as a researcher and PhD student I represented). For some this perception of vulnerability came from their children's experiences of bullying at school and/or schools' inability to provide for their special educational needs. For other families there was a suspicion of 'the authorities" intentions towards them, with talk of the government's 'wish' to 'close down' home education. At a practical level not exploiting my respondents also meant trying to 'give something back' to them in the way that Oakley (1990) describes. For two families this meant putting them in touch with other home educators (with consent from all parties). With others it meant passing on resources or answering their questions about home education, or often about post-16 education (my teaching field), while they answered mine. Deeper reciprocal relationships were built with some families; notably two adoptive mothers supported me in my personal journey towards becoming an adoptive parent. Throughout, as Brewer (2000), Lofland et al (2006) and Arksey and Knight (1999) point out, there was always a balance to be kept here between creating rapport with respondents through shared experiences and interests and maintaining the position and analytical detachment of a professional researcher.

Coming from an interpretivist perspective, I was very aware that my own interpretations of situations and actions needed testing to ensure, that I was not imposing my own meanings on situations, although as both Gaskell (2000) and May (1997) suggest this possibility can never be fully eliminated. I tested my interpretations by probing during interviews as well as revisiting ideas more than once where I spoke to families on several occasions as suggested by Gaskell (2000). The usefulness of this approach was shown on one particular occasion

when I was interviewing Jeannette and she was talking about her involvement with another home educating family and their interactions with Social Services; I had interpreted and attributed her involvement to her prior extensive professional involvement with Social Services, but when I revisited the discussion with her it became clear that her involvement had been due to her role as a leader in the home education group.

While I had identified some themes such as religion, attitudes to authority and constructions of childhood, that I expected to run through my data and to influence families' motivations and methods of home education I was also aware that, given the lack of existing research on home education, there would be analytical themes that I could not predict. I also did not want to impose a rigid analytical framework upon my data collection as there was a risk that in pre-empting interpretations I would overlook important themes and connections (Strauss, Corbin 1998, Schatzman, Strauss 1973). I therefore took both an inductive and deductive approach to my fieldwork and to the analysis of the data, meaning that the process of data collection and analysis became iterative (Bryman 2004).

Data Analysis and The Research Process

Although data analysis is traditionally regarded as coming at the end of the research process, given the under-researched and under-theorised nature of home education in England and Wales, and my resulting intent for my research methodology to be iterative and inductive, data analysis took place alongside and was formative to my data collection.

The concurrency of data collection and analysis meant that that my ongoing analysis directed the data collection process drawing on some of the principles of Grounded Theory (Strauss, Corbin 1998). In this way I was able to pick up on emerging themes and issues and to tailor my later data collection to address questions that arose from my initial analysis. The data therefore informed the direction of my research as it went forward.

I had always intended my research process to be iterative and, as my fieldwork progressed, I found my methodology evolving in order to make best use of the opportunities presented to me and also to account for subtly shifting foci in reaction to themes and problems which I had not originally anticipated. As Schatzman and Strauss (1973) note, the researcher in the field needs to be aware that research questions and themes can change as research progresses, and also to be a 'methodological pragmatist' choosing methods to fit the research problems as they evolve. The main change was the shift in the focus of my research away from children to focus on home educating parents and eventually to examine home education as a project of motherhood.

The data collected and its analysis is drawn from and focusses upon home educating parents, specifically mothers, although my initial intention was to focus on the voices of home educated children. The original plan was to carry out initial interviews with parents and then to interview the home educated children and young people as well as asking them to create photo-diaries in an effort to give the children around whom home education is centred a voice (Kirby 2002) and to focus on home educated families as a whole. This proved difficult from the beginning. There were two families where the children (both teenagers) took an active part in the interviews and one family where the

children were present throughout but reluctant to participate. On the whole, however, I found that, after a brief introduction, children tended to be ushered out of the way when I arrived in families' homes and that parents were uneasy about the idea of my interviewing the children; problems also identified by Kirby (2002) and by Yee and Andrews (2006). Instead, as parents talked to me in-depth about their own experiences of choosing and carrying out home education, I increasingly found that, whichever way families presented their constructions of childhood, choices around home education were almost entirely in the hands of the parents. This was particularly true at the 'crunch point' of deciding to home educate, which often meant the family giving up all or part of an income and one parent sacrificing a great deal of time to the project of home education. For this reason I increasingly felt that the story being told and analysed was that of the parents and that they were the ones who were central, however counter-intuitively, to the research. My iterative research process meant that I could re-frame my research questions and aims to take account of these discoveries.

As I carried out interviews and analysed the data from each one I also found that this was becoming a mothers' story. Of my interview sample, only one father (James) had the main day to day responsibility for home education; two couples (Jill and Charles, and Alan and Sarah) initially told me that they shared responsibility equally, but both later admitted that the mother had a greater responsibility for home education and was the 'driving force'. In one further couple (Cathy and Patrick) Patrick was very involved in educating his children but Cathy was again the responsible parent. In all the other two-parent families the father was peripheral or even completely absent in the mother's account of

day to day home education and on several occasions during an interview I had to check that what I had thought was a two-parent family was actually so.

In actual fact, analysis of my data followed both inductive and deductive processes reflecting the tensions between the need for theoretical sensitivity and objectivity (Strauss, Corbin 1998, Kelle 2005). I explored anticipated themes that had emerged from my analysis of home education literature such as the role of religion, personal values, pedagogical models and economic factors in the construction of home education. As well as constantly revisiting my data and developing my analysis as the research progressed, the process of constant comparison was also with regard to relevant literature (Dunne 2011). This gave me a broader perspective on my research and the ways in which it both complemented and challenged existing theorising.

Preliminary analysis was carried out as I transcribed each interview and read over records of observations. I made notes of what seemed to be emerging recurring themes or striking comments as well as of questions that were raised in my mind as I transcribed. The process of transcription, although lengthy, gave me an in-depth knowledge of my data and allowed me to start developing my analytical frameworks from an early stage, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

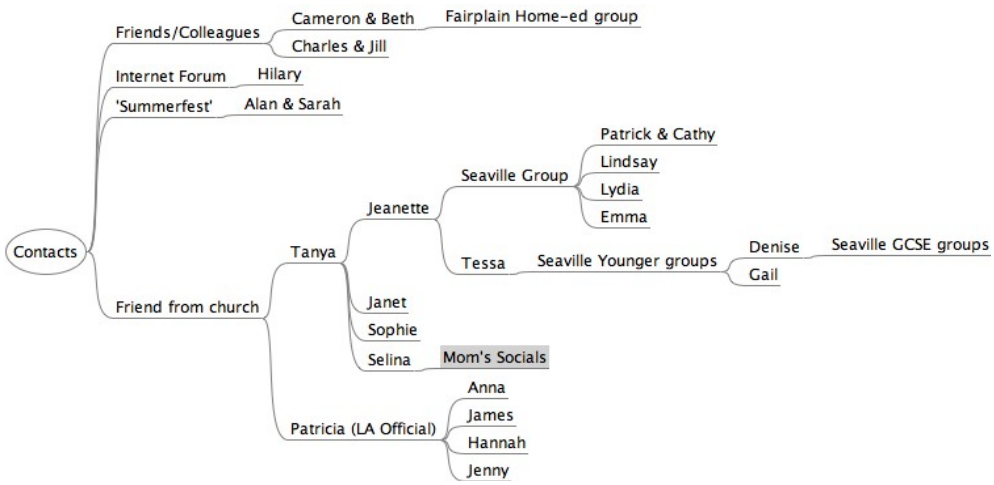
Once interviews had been transcribed and observational notes typed up, they were transferred into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package. I chose to use computerised data analysis as it allowed me to easily code data whilst maintaining its connection to the original source (Richards, Richards 1994). Using the tools provided by NVivo I could also quickly see how often

different themes were emerging, or search for phrases and terms that I remembered respondents using. This enabled me to easily check my interpretations of the data by revisiting it. In a similar way to that described by Wiltshier (2011), I was able to undertake descriptive coding of data, generating a large number of initial nodes, which could then be organised, compared and assessed, allowing me to keep track, both of my data and of my emerging theorising. The visualising tools of NVivo also allowed me to create models of my emerging themes, helping me to analyse the ways in which different aspects of my research data were interrelated. This process of constant comparison of the data with itself and also with the literature, as promoted by Strauss and Corbin (1998), as well as generating a depth of understanding of my data also aided the process of reflexivity as I was constantly checking and challenging my own interpretations of the data (Dunne 2011) and this was assisted by my use of Nvivo.

The process of writing up my analysis and findings has also extended the data analysis process, in fitting together the jigsaw of my findings I have had to re-visit my data and my previous analyses in order to check their validity and the ways in which they interrelate. However, as Dunne (2011) notes, researchers are not in themselves 'empty vessels' and although the constant checking and cross comparison of my data has lent an aspect of objectivity to my data, this thesis will have inevitably been influenced by my personal priorities, interests and interpretations of the data upon which this thesis is based and computer-aided data analysis software, whilst a useful tool cannot eliminate this (Wiltshier 2011, Welsh 2002, Coffey, Holbrook et al. 1996).

Setting up the research: sampling and access

As has already been noted, the number of home educators in England and Wales is unknown, with estimates varying widely. Figures of five to ten thousand home educated children in the mid-1990s (Meighan 1995, Petrie 1992) and 150,000 (Fortune-Wood 2005b) children educated at home today have been offered in answer to the question of 'How many?' while Hopwood et al recently came to the conclusion that no reliable estimate could be put on numbers (Hopwood, O'Neill et al. 2007). This lack of accurate numbers or even a reliable 'guesstimate', means that the parameters of the home educating population remain unknown. We do not know the characteristics of the 'average' home educator (Meighan 1995, Rothermel 2002). As a result I can make no specific claims as to the representativeness or generalisability of the findings from my sample in relation to the wider home educating population; however, they are a contribution to the small but growing body of knowledge about home educators in England and Wales.



The lack of any comprehensive or representative list of home educators and the invisibility of many of them to the educational authorities meant that finding home educating families presented a challenge. I therefore employed a number

of methods to find respondents, resulting in a mixture of snowball and opportunity sampling. As Noy (Noy 2008) notes, snowball sampling, as well as being a sampling method is also an integral part of the research process in gaining access to hidden populations. In order to get a range as well as a sufficient number of participants ('maximum variation sampling' – Lofland et al (2006)), I started my sampling from a number of different points, as can be seen in Illustration 1: Contact Network. My first point of contact were two friends who home educated their children. This route did not prove as profitable as had been hoped, one friend felt unable to participate in the study, although my status as her friend did later give me easier access to other members of her friendship circles; the other family ceased home educating shortly before I began my field work. I therefore found myself essentially starting from scratch in finding respondents. My richest source of contacts came through a friend who worked for a Local Authority in the South East of England and who provided me with two contacts; one a family who she had encountered in the course of her job (Tanya), and the other the Local Authority Advisor on Home Education (Patricia). Tanya, as well as agreeing to be interviewed, invited me to a gathering for home educators held at her home through which I gained further contacts and access to several groups. In addition to being interviewed and thus giving me a valuable overview of one aspect of home education, Patricia contacted a large number of the families that she was involved with, telling them about my research and need for participants, several of them agreed to be interviewed. These were examples of snowball sampling being respondent driven with myself as the researcher having only limited control; at the same time this method of sampling also gave me a valuable insight into the networks

and relationships of my respondents (Noy 2008). Other contacts were found ad hoc, the friends and relations of friends and colleagues; while another source of respondents was the home educators' camp 'Summerfest' that I attended in July 2007. I also found one respondent and information about one grouping of home educating families through a public online message board for adoptive parents.

The use of snowball and opportunity sampling meant that issues of access were closely tied in with those of sampling as noted by both Gaskell (2000), Noy (2008) and Lofland et al (2006). Gaining initial access presented its own challenges as many home educators are suspicious of authorities and institutions and therefore of researchers (see for example Fortune-Wood 2005a). This meant that my snowball sampling method was very appropriate as it was based on building trust with respondents, leading to their passing me on to contacts who in turn became respondents. I found that once I had gained a family's trust, the doors were opened to more home educating families. On several occasions when I went to observe home education gatherings, having requested that participants be informed beforehand of my attendance and their consent gained, I found that an e-mail had been circulated with the details of my research but also stating that I was a 'lovely person'. This was something that clearly influenced individuals' decisions as to whether to talk to me and reflects Noy's (Noy 2008) description of the ways in which dialogues with respondents earlier in the snowballing process permeate dialogues with later respondents.

There were however, occasions when access was withdrawn, most frequently through people who had agreed to participate in interviews then failing to respond to repeated e-mails or contacting me to say that they were too busy. On two occasions home educating mothers contacted me after initial agreement

to participate, saying that having discussed the research with their husbands they had decided not to take part. In this way participants exerted control over whether and the extent to which they were involved in the study and my extensive use of e-mail clearly had an effect on the power dynamics of the relationship, as noted by Mann (2000).

Several of my initial contacts turned out to be powerful gatekeepers, either formal or informal. Tanya was in many ways a matriarch in the Christian home educating community, as was Jeannette who she introduced me to and I found that their approval of my research was crucial to my access (Gaskell 2000). As I gained their trust I found that they also had the power to facilitate my research by introducing me to other home educators and giving me information about additional home education organisations.

Patricia's role as a Local Authority employee made her a formal gatekeeper, although her relationship with home educators was typically based on the building of personal relationships and respect as her official position was hampered by the ambiguous legal position of home education. 'Summerfest', the home educators' camp that I attended was advertised as open to the general public although aimed at home educators. This raised the issue of observation in a 'quasi-public' space (Lofland, Snow et al. 2006) and I did liaise with the organisers of the camp to ensure that my presence as a researcher was acceptable, fortunately the organisers agreed to this, although this did not remove the ethical issues of being an 'unknown investigator' to the majority of those I observed. Gaining respondents from the adopters' message board required some careful thought. As I was known on the boards by my deliberately anonymous user-name I was reluctant to expose my identity and

also unsure of the etiquette of posting a request for research respondents. I contacted the board's moderator who after asking for more details about my research posted a request for respondents for me, thus maintaining my anonymity.

Overall I interviewed members of 19 different families in addition to significant interactions with around 40 other home educators and their families during observations. As Crouch and McKenzie (2006) note, such a qualitative research project aims to scrutinise the dynamics of a situation rather than seeking to present a representative sample, and my sample size was adequate for me to gain an in-depth picture of home educators' situations and experiences, whilst being small enough for me to maintain close contact with my data. My respondents were by no means an homogeneous group, the sizes and characteristics of families varied widely. Of the 19 families interviewed, 10 families had two or fewer children, while one family had 11 children and one had eight. It is also interesting to note that only 47 out of 60 children (less than four-fifths) were or had been home educated, and less than three-quarters of the 19 families were home educating or had home educated all their children. Children who were being home educated at the time of the study ranged in age from 2 years old to 16 years old. I had originally intended to define home educated children as those aged between 5 and 16 years of age as that is what is defined in law as 'compulsory school age' (1996 Education Act). I found, however, that home educating families with children under the age of five defined home education as starting from birth with several saying to me that all parents home educate their children until they reach 'school age' by teaching them to walk, talk, interact socially and often by teaching the rudiments of reading, writing and

numeracy; they therefore defined those children as being home educated and I chose to adopt their definition.

Not all families had, however, home educated their children 'from birth' (only six of the 19 families interviewed), with the majority having withdrawn their children from school. Children tended to have been withdrawn from school either in the early stages of primary school or around the time of changeover from primary to secondary school.

Three of the families interviewed were headed by single mothers (Emma, Anna and Lindsay), two of whom were working part time while home educating. All the other families were headed by heterosexual couples, all but three of whom were married. Most of the home educating families I talked to could be defined as middle class through their family background, educational background and occupations, although many were less economically well-off than would be expected either because of their lifestyle choices or because income had been sacrificed by one parent in order to home educate. Five of the mothers I interviewed were qualified school teachers which accords roughly with figures given by Stevens (2001) and Thomas (1998) (suggesting that around 25% of home educating parents are qualified teachers. Eleven parents responsible for home education had university degrees, significantly above the national average, while in 14 of the 19 families interviewed at least one parent held some form of professional qualification or was working in a managerial role – this included a medical doctor, two engineers, two social workers and an academic.

Families that I visited were located in the Midlands, South East, South West, and East of England, with one family in Wales. Because of the location of my own home and of the contacts I made, the majority (15) of my interviewees were located within the South East of England which, given the socio-economic patterns of the region as generally affluent, may have have had an effect upon the 'representativeness' of my sample relative to England and Wales. All families interviewed were white British apart from one white South African Afrikaans speaking family. I did encounter and talk to some black and minority ethnic families during my observations, however, there were very few such families with the over-whelming culture seeming to be white British, with a sprinkling of white South African and American families among the more formal home educators.

Throughout my fieldwork the building of trust with my respondents was crucial to gaining further respondents and maintaining access to the groups I visited. I was consistently impressed at how trusting and welcoming families were to me once they had established my credentials. Wherever possible I sought to build a positive rapport with respondents by finding interests that we had in common, often my interest in home education was sufficient. This building of rapport and the complexities of my role-playing are discussed later.

Ethics

Throughout my research I had to be constantly aware of the ethical dimensions and implications of my research upon my respondents, home educators as a wider group, myself and wider society. I therefore consulted various ethical guidelines, including those of the British Sociological Association (2002) and the

American Sociological Association (1999), as well as making myself aware of specific writing around ethical dealings with families and children (for example Masson 2000, Lindsay 2000, Graue, Walsh 1998) and used them to guide my research. With home education such an under-researched area, especially from a Sociological perspective, I also wanted to leave behind a favourable environment for further research.

Informed consent from all participants was a key requirement of my research (Bulmer 2001). All the families who participated in my research, either formally or informally, were given information about my research and my contact details so that they could ask any questions they felt necessary. Where possible, when I visited groups this information was disseminated before my visit by the gatekeepers, usually by making people aware of the website (www.homeeducation.wordpress.com) that I had set up which outlined my aims, methods and participants' rights; this data was also available as a printed sheet for those who did not have access to the internet (see Appendix C). When visiting groups I also wore a badge making it clear that I was researcher and was open about what I was doing and my purposes when I introduced myself to people.

Families that I met for scheduled interviews, were given the same information and in addition their written consent was gained using a formal consent form (see Appendix B). With each interviewee I discussed what I was doing and checked parents' understanding of my research and the use of the data before commencing the interview. On many occasions discussion of my research formed a useful ice-breaker prior to the commencement of the interview.

As both Bulmer (2001) and Bryman (2004) note, consent is not something that can be negotiated once and then assumed. Consent was re-confirmed and re-negotiated with families wherever appropriate. For example, on one occasion during an interview a participant, when describing an incident said “don't quote me on this”; this meant that I needed to return to the respondent and check the boundaries of “don't quote” while at the same time reassuring her of her and others' anonymity in the research. On this occasion, upon reading over the transcript and being assured of anonymity, the respondent gave me written consent to make use of the data in question.

Part of the re-negotiation of consent was achieved through the sharing of interview transcripts. Each taped interview was transcribed as soon as possible and the transcript was then sent by e-mail or post to the respondent; this gave them some control over the data as I made it clear that they were welcome to read over the transcript and also that they could tell me if they wanted parts of the transcript withdrawn from the data or if they wanted to clarify anything that had been said. None of my respondents asked for any data to be withheld although a couple of families did clarify points that they felt were unclear.

Several families that I spoke to were not known to the authorities as home educators, others were concerned that they did not want their children's traumatic experiences to be traceable, still others just did not want to see their names associated with what they had said. One mother was repeatedly concerned that her story would be splashed across the front page of a tabloid newspaper. For these reasons confidentiality was an important feature of my ethical framework.

All of my participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. This meant that I did not identify respondents to each other or to third parties without consent. I also committed to anonymise all my data prior to use in my thesis or any other publication. All names and places have therefore been disguised. On several occasions I needed to reassure respondents of the confidentiality of what they had said to me, most often when I returned interview transcripts to respondents. At that point I was often asked for reassurance that their names would be changed prior to the use of any of their comments.

On only one occasion were respondents initially unwilling to give their formal consent to their participation on my research and this centred around the issue of confidentiality. I had placed limits upon the confidentiality I could promise, being very aware that the fact that my research concerned children created a new ethical dimension to be considered around children as vulnerable individuals (Graue, Walsh 1998). I therefore stated that I would maintain confidentiality unless I considered that information I was given signalled a serious risk to somebody's welfare (see Appendix B). This particular couple were concerned that I might use this condition as an excuse to report families to social services, leading to the removal of children (a concern among some home educating families). After a frank and lengthy discussion of my reasoning they did eventually give their consent, however I had to be prepared to leave that interview setting had they said 'no'.

For several families conversations and interviews raised sensitive issues and I had to be aware of this in my questioning. Several parents talked about their children self-harming or being extremely depressed and one mother talked about her daughter's suicide attempts; these memories were clearly traumatic

and often raised feelings of anger towards schools or teachers whom they felt had failed their children. One mother was clearly unconfident about her abilities as a home educator and was therefore very worried that I would report her to the authorities despite reassurances of confidentiality; this meant that I could not ask her many of the questions I had wanted to ask about her own educational and social background as it quickly became clear that she felt such questions were designed to undermine her. As Arksey and Knight (1999) state, there is little written and few guidelines on how to deal with respondents' emotions during interviews which discuss sensitive issues, so each situation had to be carefully dealt with.

Although I had originally intended to gather all my data via face to face interviews, I found that for a few respondents e-mail became a valuable way of gathering additional data. For some respondents e-mail was a much more comfortable way for them to address sensitive issues and they were therefore much more open via this medium than in interviews as noted by Mann (2000). One example of this was my correspondence with Hilary as her e-mails were very reflective and often provided more in-depth answers to my questions. For Hilary and for others I also found that they often responded to my routine update e-mails by sending me valuable updates describing changes in their children's education, progress made, or incidents and activities that for them epitomised what they felt to be best about home education.

Data Collection

As already stated, in line with my interpretivist approach, the main methods used for data collection were semi-structured face-to-face interviews and participant and non-participant observation.

I carried out observation in a range of settings described below including a week's home educators' camp and a number of home education groups. My first piece of fieldwork was a very literal interpretation of the term as I spent a week camping in an increasingly muddy field. 'Summerfest', the home educators' camp that I participated in, ran for a week in early summer at a large seaside holiday park. There were around 2,000 people attending (both adults and children), with most camping in tents or caravans. Although most families were already home educating their children there were also some who were considering home education and who had come to find out more. The structure of the week was informal, with a variety of activities for families to join in with as and when they wished. These included concerts, bouncy castles, play for toddlers in the 'peace tipis', singing workshops, green woodcarving, copper-beating, 'creating a nuclear-free zone', belly-dancing, weaving, science talks and a solar-powered cinema. Most activities were non-directive, simply providing materials, following a philosophy of autonomous, child-led education. Socialising was arranged primarily around two tented cafés, serving vegan and organic fare. The majority of families I spoke to subscribed to the concept of 'autonomous' home education and this was also the form of home education that seemed to be heavily promoted throughout the camp, by the speakers at talks and in the general tone of entertainment and activities during the week. As Kawulich (2005) notes, participant observation can be a valuable beginning step

for a piece of research. This was certainly true in this case as Summerfest gave me an insight into the culture of the home educators that I was observing and an understanding of the ways in which they organised and related (or resisted relating) to each other. This insight helped me to formulate questions that were relevant both to my research and to those I was researching (Kawulich 2005).

In Brewer's (2000) terms I was a 'participant-observer', being personally familiar with the role of a 'camper' at large organised events but unfamiliar with the social contexts of 'Summerfest'. I attended workshops and talks, sat in the cafés and talked to people and talked to those camping around me – outside tents, when washing-up, in the queue for the showers in the mornings and whenever conversations were to be had. I was open both about my purpose in attending the camp and about my ambivalence regarding home education. There was a sense from those I met that if I was willing to come and camp in a muddy field with them then I must be both serious about my research and interested in getting a balanced view on home education. Also that, while people wanted to convince me of the benefits of home education, as somebody outside the dynamics of home education and the camp I was simultaneously 'safe' to talk to about their concerns and irritations regarding the camp and home education in general, an effect noted by Lofland et al (2006). One difficulty which I did encounter in participant observing was that of being excluded at various points where people were either not interested in interacting with me or made it clear that I was not welcome (Kawulich 2005). One example of this was a workshop on 'home education burn-out', which the organisers clearly felt was not something that I, as a researcher, should be present for.

Starting conversations and making contact with people was, also, often not easy; the dynamics of the camp were that there were many distinct groups (often friends or local home education support groups) who tended to maintain a form of social closure whereby entry to the group was by introduction.

As well as providing valuable and rich data in itself, it turned out that attending 'Summerfest' was incredibly valuable as it allowed me access to a type of home educator that is otherwise difficult to gain access to: those who hold an anti-authority standpoint and are generally keen to remain hidden from public view.

I also participant-observed at three evenings for home educating parents. All of these evenings were run by Christian home educators; the first was a very informal gathering of around 30 people, open to home educators from all backgrounds and philosophies, where parents chatted about their experiences and shared ideas and resources. The evening was hosted by Tanya, one of my respondents, who also ran her own business selling imported Christian home education resources and this evening was also (but not primarily) a chance for parents to look at and buy her resources. Tanya had invited me because she thought (correctly) that it would be useful to my research and also because she thought that my experience teaching A-level Sociology might be of interest to other home educators as she said that many were interested in it. As it turned out no-one chose to ask me about A-levels but it did give me a role in being there.

The evening at Tanya's provided me with three further respondents and also an invitation from Selina to the 'Moms' evenings' that she ran with another woman. I attended two of these evenings which were much more structured and

exclusively aimed at Christian home educating mothers. Evenings started with a social time, prayer and then a discussion topic presented by one of the women, there was food shared and then a further time of prayer. Attendance appeared to be fluid, without a clearly defined notion of being a 'group', on each occasion there were about eight to ten women present but not all the women were present on both occasions. As these evenings involved home educating mothers discussing their aims, methods and resources in home educating and often involved in-depth questioning from mothers who were new to home education about how they 'should' do things, they were very valuable to me as a researcher in helping me to understand the mothers' understanding and rationales and to highlight issues for further investigation (Kawulich 2005) meaning that I was better prepared for interviews that followed (Stroh 2000).

Invitations to home education groups where home educated children came together for joint activities provided opportunities for non-participant observation. Jeanette, a friend of Tanya's, invited me along to the Seaville group's 'open day' where there were a range of activities as well as a company selling home education resources. Seaville was the largest group I came into contact with and they saw themselves as unusual in their size and diversity. They estimated that there were about 50-60 families involved and the group had split itself into several loose subgroups for different activities according to children's ages, abilities and interests. These groups included an art group, French lessons for the younger children, a writing group and GCSE English and Maths groups. I attended and observed six of these sub groups over a period of several weeks as well as going along to the more general group 'open day'. Seaville was a very diverse group, having children of all ages and abilities and

also having families from a mix of faiths (and of no faith) and with a mixture of motivations for home educating. This was unusual as most groups I encountered or was told about were clearly defined according to methods and motivations for home education. My repeated contact with the Seaville group meant that I encountered the same families several times and was also able to build up a clear picture of the group dynamics. My repeated presence also allowed me to gain a measure of trust so that I was treated as a normal 'fixture' and also accorded a degree of confidence by group members. This growth of trust was displayed in that some mothers who had initially been wary about talking to me eventually became very happy to talk to me, with some actively inviting me to interview them.

The groups described above that I visited varied in size, and numbers were often difficult to judge as groups were informal and highly fluid in their formation with families joining and leaving as it suited their needs. However, the final home education group that I visited, 'Fairplain', was much more clearly defined as they had formed a cooperative to build their own building with about 10 families involved. Even so, for the Fairplain group actual 'attendance' at each meeting was variable, with only five families there on the day that I visited. Meeting in a partially finished, self-built, eco-friendly building, the Fairplain group met three days a week for a range of 'lessons' taught by the adults and open to the children to participate in or not as they wished. I spent one day with them and as with the other groups was made welcome and was able to gain an insight into the dynamics and activities of the group. In this group I found that several members were keen to talk to me as they themselves had an academic background and therefore the language of social research was one that they

were familiar with, leading them to ask questions about my methodology and the overall structure of my research.

Making field notes during observation was a largely ad hoc process. Where possible I carried around a notebook and I found that when non-participant observing it was possible to make basic notes that could serve as a valuable prompt to memory and be fleshed out later, although I always stuck by the statement that 'the general rule of thumb is "Don't jot conspiciously"' (Lofland, Snow et al. 2006, p.109). At other times making notes in situ was not feasible, for example when participating in a singing workshop at 'Summerfest' or eating a meal with a group of mothers. On these occasions I made sure that I made detailed notes as soon as possible after the observation, recording impressions, comments and as much detail of the setting as possible.

I found recording the unstructured conversations that I had with families during observations more difficult. The detail and length of the conversations meant that they were in many ways akin to interviews (Brewer 2000), but often recording them either on tape or on paper was impossible as they had started in passing, over the washing up or while cooking or eating. I usually recorded as much as I could recall in field notes as soon after the event as possible, sometimes this was during a break in the conversation, at other times it might be an hour or two before I had an opportunity to make detailed notes. Where possible I would try to jot down key words on a note pad during the conversation without making it stilted, sometimes I did not have a notepad with me and there were also occasions when I should probably have been bolder about taking out my notebook and making notes. Obviously such methods raise the issues of re-call and interpretation as discussed by Bryman (2004) and

Kawulich (2005) and this meant that the data I gathered through recorded interviews was a useful means of checking the themes that were coming out of my conversations during observations. All field notes were later typed up into computerised text files so that they were integral to the detailed analysis of my data.

While I gained rich and varied data from my observations which provided much contextual information, interviews were my main source of detailed data, allowing me to directly explore my research questions (Stroh 2000, Hammersley 2003). Interviews were semi-structured, I had a loose schedule of points to cover with respondents but often these were covered as they were raised or as fitted logically into the sequence of the interview rather than in a strict order, as suggested by Bryman (2004) and Gaskell (2000). The schedule evolved slightly over the course of the first four or five interviews as respondents raised points which I felt were important to my research but had not previously specifically considered.

On average interviews lasted for about one and a half hours, with some lasting up to two hours and a few lasting barely an hour. The length of interviews was dictated by how willing respondents were to talk to me, how articulate they were and also by practical time constraints, indicating the two-way power balance of the research relationship (Stoecker 1991). Interviews were on several occasions ended by children declaring to their parents that it was lunch-time, while others were interrupted by toddlers waking from or needing naps. On several occasions it was some time before I actually got round to specifically raising any of the points on my interview schedule, as many parents were keen to start by telling me either about their current struggles and position on home

education or to tell me about their journey into home education. As these were things I was interested in, many of the interviews were therefore largely respondent-led with me asking clarifying questions and leading more as the interview neared its end and I tried to cover any aspects that I felt had been missed.

All but three of the semi-structured interviews took place in respondents' homes, usually in the relaxed setting of the family sitting room. Two interviews took place in the community hall where one group met, with my carrying out the interview with parents while their children were involved in Maths and English lessons. In one instance that was because I had just met the parents (Patrick and Cathy) and they had suggested that I interview them then and there, in the other instance Lindsay, who was mistrustful of me, did not want me to know her home address (although she later gave it to me because she wanted a copy of my interview notes). One further interview took place in a supermarket café as the mother explained that her son struggled with strangers in their house due to his autism.

Where possible all interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder so that they could be transferred to a computer and transcribed, this also allowed me to pay greater attention to what was being said, rather than needing to focus on note-taking (Bryman 2004). A gadget which few had seen before, my digital recorder served to break the ice with several respondents and provide a relaxed start to the interview. There were only three occasions out of 23 interviews when I could not use the recorder; twice because of background noise and once during my interview with Beth, who self-started the interview while I was helping her son to mash a pan of potatoes and my recorder was inaccessible in another

part of the house. Recording the interviews gave me highly detailed data as I had an accurate record of what had been said, including respondents' tone of voice, laughter, and any significant pauses. Interviews were transcribed as soon as possible which meant that I could usually recall where respondents had used significant gestures or facial expressions and add these to the transcripts.

In all, 19 families were 'formally' interviewed along with one Local Authority official ('formally' in the sense that dates and time for interviews were set up) and these interviews provided the bulk of my data. Three families whom I interviewed in the early stages of my fieldwork were interviewed twice in order to gain greater depth of data and also to cover points missed in the first interviews. As Gaskell (2000) comments, this number of interviews is around the maximum that a single researcher can retain the intimate connection with that is necessary for more than superficial analysis. In addition to this around another 40 families spent extensive time (sometimes several hours) talking to me in more informal settings during observations, often on several different occasions.

The Researcher Role

Throughout the fieldwork I felt that my self-presentation and role-playing as a researcher was key to the success of my research. I knew that my behaviour and how I presented myself would affect my access to respondents and to research settings as well as the honesty of respondents (Lofland, Snow et al. 2006, Brewer 2000, Hammersley 2003). I was very aware that my role as a 'researcher' and an 'academic' (and therefore to some extent an 'official') could be threatening to some respondents (Stroh 2000). In addition I was researching

something highly personal and essentially questioning my respondents' choices about their children's upbringing. Many of the families I interacted with during my fieldwork differed significantly from me in socio-economic terms, although there were others who were very similar. In particular several families were significantly less well-off financially than I was, while others had made a conscious decision to reject the middle-class suburban lifestyle that I live. I therefore felt very aware of aspects of my presentation that might affect how my respondents perceived me and also affect the power balance of the researcher-researched relationship (Stroh 2000). For this reason I did things like making a conscious choice to use my small car when visiting families rather than my husband's larger car; I also tried to modulate my dress to fit what I thought respondents would be most comfortable with. At 'Summerfest', where a large proportion of people were vegetarian or vegan and there was an emphasis on fairly traded, organic, eco-friendly food and products, I felt quite self-conscious even about my choices of food and washing up liquid (which were very visible given that everyone was camping) – I was grateful that I had bought a bottle of Ecover washing up liquid rather than my usual choice of less environmentally friendly Fairy Liquid, but felt less sure about the pack of luxury yoghurts picked up in haste.

When I started my fieldwork I was still working as a teacher in a private secondary school and I was apprehensive about how this might be perceived by respondents – especially at 'Summerfest' where there was a high degree of anti-school sentiment. My role as a teacher could have served to reinforce the perception of me as representative of 'the authorities', and I therefore thought carefully about how I presented myself. Although I did not declare my role as a

teacher to all and sundry, I was open about it when people wanted to know where my interest in home education came from and could genuinely explain that my range of experiences of education as both teacher and pupil had given me an interest in alternative education. In reality (and an interesting example of the complexity and fluidity of research relationships (Stroh 2000)) I found that, accompanied by this explanation, everyone I spoke to seemed unconcerned by my being a teacher; more autonomous parents tended to comment that many teachers 'saw the light' and became home educators themselves; while formal home educators sometimes asked me for advice about post-16 education (my main teaching field). With the several parents who were qualified teachers, my role served as an area of common experience, echoing Hughes' (1992) emphasis on the role of common biographies in developing the researcher-researched relationship.

Going into family homes I found that the balance between the roles of 'researcher' and 'good guest' as discussed by Yee and Andrews (2006) was a fine one. Sometimes there was a clear sense that interviewees felt that an interview was at its end before I did and on these occasions it was a challenge to balance between respecting my respondent and trying to gather as much data as I could (Stroh 2000). On the other hand, families often invited me to stay for meals after an interview was finished and one offered me a bed for the night after a long journey, although this was not taken up as I had work commitments to return for. These offers were usually genuine and where possible I took them up as they provided valuable opportunities for me to get a greater sense of the families' dynamics and also to continue conversations which often became more frank once the recorder was turned off (Yee, Andrews

2006). As parents relaxed after the end of the official interview they often remembered points that they had intended to make or things which they thought I would find interesting, on many occasions I was urged to get my notebook out again. On the whole families were very welcoming to me and on occasions the line between researcher and good guest was not an issue of overstaying my welcome as discussed by Yee and Andrews (2006), but rather of leaving before families felt I should, a difficult judgement which is also raised by Hughes (1992).

Perhaps naively, I had not expected my own personal faith to interact with the research process. In this I was proved very wrong as it had both positive, negative and ethical impacts upon my data collection. With most of my respondents my faith as a Christian was not part of the exchange, but on some occasions it became part of the conversation and background to interviews and observations.

At 'Summerfest', observing events and interactions and talking to campers I quickly picked up a high level of hostility to evangelical Christians and to Christian home educators in particular, they were regarded as “not proper home educators” and ridiculed and spoken of derisively. Large numbers of cars at the camp bore on their rear bumper or rear windscreen an image of a fish with legs and the word 'Darwin' inside – in mockery of the fish-symbol used by Christians. There were occasions when the hostility towards Christians felt quite threatening. As a result of these experiences I usually removed the fish symbol and church sticker from my car prior to interviews or observations where I felt it could be an issue.

On one occasion however, having driven for five hours and got lost trying to find a respondent's home I arrived somewhat flustered to find my respondent waiting for me in a car park. I had forgotten to remove my stickers and my respondent had clearly taken note of them. During the interview my respondent made pointed comments about Christianity and the Bible, alternatively belittling it and trying to show me that his beliefs were compatible with mine. That this was influenced by his perception of me was clear from the responses of his partner (who had not seen my car) to his comments, she repeatedly asked him what he was “going on” about. The reaction to symbols of my faith clearly affected the data I collected on this occasion, although fortunately moderated by the partner's unawareness of the situation. There was also a noticeable effect in other situations, although not always with such negative results.

On several occasions my faith, as an area of common biography with some respondents actually gave me an advantage in the research process and meant that I gained access and gathered data in which would not otherwise would have been possible. (Hughes 1992) One of my main sources of access to home educators (both Christian and non-Christian and with a wide variety of outlooks on home education) was Tanya to whom I was introduced by a friend. My friend had described my research interest to Tanya but had also mentioned my status as a 'friend from church'. Having interviewed Tanya I was 'approved' by her and invited to a gathering of protestant evangelical Christian home educators at Tanya's home and introduced to people by e-mail as a home education researcher but also as a fellow protestant evangelical Christian. My faith seemed to be seen as a sign that I was in some way 'safe' and sympathetic, even though I was very clear about my personal ambivalence

about home education, while many of them saw it as a tenet of their faith. This sense of sympathy and also a level of shared culture as evangelical Christians meant that many of the Christian home educators that I met at Tanya's were happy to be interviewed by me, while Selina felt comfortable to invite me to another event for 'homeschooling moms' which included times of prayer and Bible study as well as discussing Christian home education. My faith also meant that protestant evangelical Christian home educators were very open in talking to me both about the role of their faith in home education and also about their concerns about secular school-based education.

As well as affecting respondents' reactions and the access given to me, my faith also raised some ethical issues during fieldwork and when analysing and deciding how to use my data. Hughes (1992) notes the difficulties that the creation of a strong rapport with respondents can bring, with the need to negotiate situations that tread a fine line between friendship and the researcher role in the ways respondents view the researcher. These issues came about because, although I shared a faith with some of my respondents, I discovered that some individuals at groups that I attended interpreted some aspects of their faith very differently to me. Perhaps because of their trust in me, these women spoke openly about these aspects which included quite controversial views. Many of these differences were to do with women's roles as mothers and educators and thus with home education. In presenting my data I had to consider my duty of care to these respondents who had confessed to me views and attitudes which would be seen in mainstream society as extreme. Although respondents had trusted me with very personal accounts of their decisions and experiences surrounding home education because in many ways I shared their

cultural understandings and values, I was very aware that the audience for my research might not have the same understanding or sensitivity. Having personally experienced derisive comments about the Christian faith and Christians from other sociologists I felt that I owed some duty of care to the respondents who had trusted me with their experiences and feelings while at the same time acknowledging the importance of such data on values and attitudes to my research findings. I hope that, in accordance with Lofland et al's assertions, this tension is indeed

> 'an indicator that one is "getting it right" from a social scientific standpoint; for its absence suggests extreme distance or extreme surrender and the perspectival and analytical biases associated with both.'
>
> (2006, p.63)

4 Meaning and Motivations

Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to my findings on home educating parents as well as an important exploration of the data itself. Motivations for home education and parents'[19] associated attitudes towards state and school form a basis for understanding the practices and experiences of home education explored later in the thesis. Parents' motivations for home educating had a profound effect upon their pedagogical practices and were also closely linked to their constructions of motherhood and childhood that became core to their modelling of home education.

One recurring theme within home educators' constructions and descriptions of their motivations to home educate was the notion of parental[20] responsibility and the reclaiming or separation of that responsibility from that held by the state. Both in law and in common culture there is a sense of a co-responsibility for children between the parent and the state (New, David 1985, Miller 2005). This is particularly true for education, where legally it is the parents' duty to ensure that children receive an appropriate education, but the state also shares that duty. Generally the co-responsibility is implemented through children's school attendance and it is implicit that the state holds the best interests of children at heart and that those best equipped to educate children are the professionals within the education system.

19 I use the term 'parents' here as home educators in two-parent families, both male and female, tended to present their attitudes towards state and school as being shared by both the mother and father in their family.

20 'parental' responsibility was seen as being held by both parents but carried out on a day-to-day basis predominantly by mothers; see Hughes et al (1991)

In the case of home educators, however, the co-responsibility relationship has either never existed or has broken down. This chapter starts by exploring the rupture of that relationship and identifying an overarching emphasis on the individual. I then proceed to examine the problems with schooling and the role of the state, as perceived by home educators. The existence of a widespread fear of persecution among home educating families, something not identified by previous research, is established and its positioning as key to the motivations and attitudes of home educators is explored. These explorations of the world-views of home educating families lay the foundations for the examination of the experiences and constructions of home education, motherhood and childhood explored in the following chapters.

This chapter draws upon a range of existing literatures. Home education literature is made use of insofar as it illuminates and explores home educators' motivations and attitudes to school and state. Where home education literature is lacking, or my findings benefit from greater contextualisation, this literature is supplemented by broader literature in the area of educational choice and private schooling as well as drawing upon neo-Marxist literature which is used to highlight the nature of some home educators' choices and attitudes.

Differing from previous research, my data suggests that home educators can be categorised into three broad 'types', based upon their motivations for home educating and their associated attitudes to the nature and functions of the state and the formal school system. These three types: Natural, Social and Last Resort are broad and heterogeneous groupings (I hesitate to call them 'groups' as home educators within each type would not necessarily identify closely with each other) which hold some key foci in common and can be located along a

continuum of attitudes to school-based education which ranges from the concept of schooling (and state involvement in schooling) as problematic, to the practice of school provision as the root of the problem. This is shown in Illustration 2: Continuum of types of home educator.

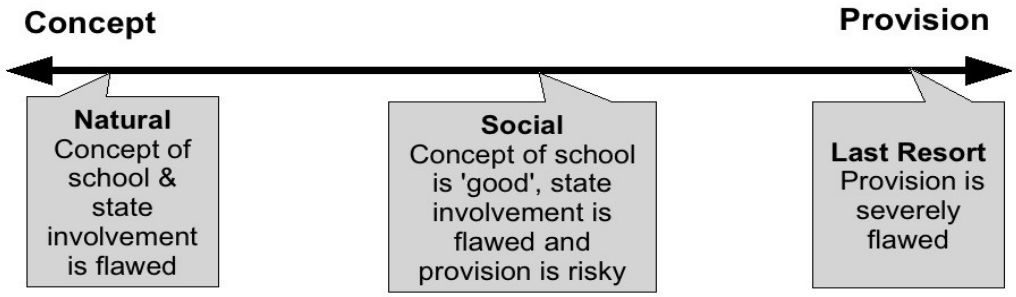


Illustration 2: Continuum of types of home educator

The motivations and attitudes of each type also have a significant impact on their practices in home education, something which is explored in Chapter 6. As we will see, these categorisations differ significantly from those identified by American home education researchers such as Van Galen's (1988) *Ideologues* and *Pedagogues* and Mayberry's (1989) four motivational classifications. They therefore counter the common assertion in US home education literature that the primary division between home educators is along religious/non-religious grounds and the assertion in UK literature that classification is impossible due to extreme diversity among home educators (Rothermel 2003, Rothermel 2011).

I now proceed to briefly outline each of the three types of home educator in order to set the scene for the exploration of attitudes and motivations that takes

place in the rest of the chapter. The characteristics of each type are further explored and developed as we progress through the analysis of my data.

I have named the first type of home educator 'Natural' as it was a term frequently used by these families to describe their choices around childhood, learning, education and lifestyle. In using the term they were often referring to a way of life outside what they saw as coercive social structures and often evoked images of an idealised pre-industrial lifestyle. Natural home educators tended to view themselves as independent of (or trying to be independent of) dominant social discourses and structures and therefore tended to be rejecting, either overtly or less consciously, of state structures and authority. Home education was therefore part of the rejection of authority and a rediscovery of a more 'authentic' way of living. Natural home educators matched most closely the dominant portrayal of home education in UK literature and particularly in popular home education literature (Dowty 2000, Fortune-Wood 2001, Fortune-Wood 2005, Webb 1990).

Social home educators also tended to view themselves as separate from dominant lifestyles and and discourses, although in contrast to Natural home educators this was presented with an emphasis on the need for sound moral structures and a concern that their children should be socialised in a way that they felt was appropriate to their values and lifestyles. Many of the Social home educators that I encountered held strong religious beliefs (predominantly evangelical Christian) which informed their world-views. However, this was not the case for all Social home educators and neither could all the holders of strong religious beliefs be categorised as Social home educators; they were also found amongst the Natural and Last Resort groups; countering the strong

line drawn between the religious right and other home educators by those such as Apple (2000) and Stevens (2001). For Social home educators therefore, home education was a means of ensuring the desired social milieu for their children as the interactions within schools, between teachers and children, and the curriculum of mainstream schools was seen as risky or inappropriate.

In contrast to the Natural and Social home educators discussed above, for eight families interviewed (and many others whom I encountered) home education had been a 'last resort', rather than a deliberate choice such as that described in the mainstream school choice literature (see for example Ball 2003, West, Noden 2003, Reay 1996). These Last Resort families had assumed that school would 'work' for their children, but for various reasons had felt compelled to withdraw them to be home educated, although this had not been an ideal option. Several families spoke of their children having come close to suicide or emotional breakdown prior to being removed from school, with the cause being their children's needs and the inability of individual schools to meet those needs. Ofsted (2010) report negative school experiences to be a significant factor in the choice of home education. Accounts of bullying are present in popular home education literature, and Fortune-Wood (2007) and Knox (1989) suggest home education as a means of dealing with school phobia. However, home education as a last resort has not been addressed in any focussed way by other researchers on home education. With nearly half of my interviewees belonging to this type, along with numerous others met during observations, my research suggests that this is a significant grouping.

For most home educators therefore (some 'natural' families excepted), the decision to home educate came from a conviction that the school system, or an

individual school, was dysfunctional, rather than from a conviction that home education was the best form of education[21]. Parents' perceptions of the problems with school were closely associated with their notions of responsibility for their children and perceptions of the entities from whom they saw themselves to be taking back that responsibility.

Notions of responsibility and the individual

In examining the rupture or non-establishment of parent-state co-responsibility, the three core types of home educator already identified are relevant. “Natural' and 'Social' home educators have, on the whole, never chosen to share responsibility, although a few rupture the relationship after a brief period of formal schooling. “Last Resort” home educators on the other hand, have experienced a failure by the state to shoulder its part of the co-responsibility for their children's education and they have therefore retreated into home education. For Last Resort home educators this rupture often occurred after lengthy attempts to maintain the parent-state relationship; and home education was seen less as a choice than something born out of desperation.

Running through mothers' constructions of motherhood and childhood (explored in Ch5) was a strong theme of the individual. This went beyond the constructions of their children as individuals with individual needs noted by writers on motherhood (see for example Miller 2005) to a focus on the individual above others. The home educators I encountered often did not seem to consider themselves or their children as an integral part of a wider community or society beyond their immediate support networks, giving credence to Apple's

21 This interesting ambivalence to home education is explored in Chapter 7, the purpose of this chapter being to focus on the dissatisfaction with state and school.

(2001) and Reich's (2002) concerns about home education as an indicator of an increasingly individualistic and fragmented society. Instead society was seen as threatening, either through its moral disintegration or through the sinister intent of the state attitudes as noted by Apple (2001) and Lubienski (2003). There was however, contrary to Apple's (2000) view of home educators as totally isolating their children from mainstream society, a grudging acceptance by most that their children would need to interact with that society and that they therefore needed to be equipped to do so.

This focus on the individual and separation from society affected home educators' constructions of the notion of responsibility. Perceiving themselves as individuals separate from rather than part of a cohesive society, their responsibility was constructed as being (primarily and often solely) to themselves and their children. As a result most parents did not appear to construct themselves as having responsibility to or for others beyond their immediate family and network. Echoing Kozol's (1982) comments about the inward-facing nature of the free school movement, home education in this context was very much an individual solution that worked for them and for their children and there was little interest in broader solutions to the perceived problems of school-based education that had led them to home educate. This primacy of the individual over society echoes the assertions of Apple (2000), Lubienski (2003) and Reich (2002) in their critiques of home educators as potentially damaging to society due to their lack of interest in maintaining social cohesion and contributing to social benefit. Relationships between home educators were also typically founded on a basis of convenience and fulfilment of need rather than on a sense of obligation.

In many ways, such an individualistic approach is a logical conclusion of the rejection of the conventional relationship of co-responsibility for the child between parents and the state. These parents had assumed sole responsibility for their children and their children's education and it followed that they would not therefore expect the state to provide a solution to the educational needs of children, nor would they expect to take any responsibility for the education of the children of others. My findings regarding home educators' constructions of responsibility and their associated primary concern for the individual are not present anywhere in the existing literature on home education in England and Wales and contradict the construction of home educators as altruistic, interdependent and cooperative by Meighan (1995), Barson (2004) and Rothermel (2000) with their vision of home education as a starting point for the creation of 'open schools' and informal learning centres.

As already identified, Natural home educators distanced themselves from what they saw as coercive social structures and the tyranny of contemporary society. As a result there was a strong sense of taking responsibility for themselves by becoming independent of a mainstream culture that was perceived as harmful and oppressive. For many, especially those who participated in 'Summerfest' (which was dominated by Natural home educators), this was expressed in their choice of alternative lifestyles:

> we got involved in home education as part of a change of lifestyle, addressing some of the imbalances in the way we were living. One of the catalysts was my partner getting breast cancer, which helped us face up to certain beliefs that influence disease and more healthy options. Stressful environments and

> stressful lifestyle: the Western environment is full of stressful lifestyles and stressful diseases. *(Alan, Interview)*

For many Natural families the lifestyle involved a rejection of consumer culture, and a concern for the environment expressed through the adoption of vegetarian or vegan diet and a lifestyle as close to subsistence living as possible. In Alan and Sarah's case this led them to live in a yurt (Mongolian tent) as part of an alternative community. For other families the alternative lifestyle chosen was not as extreme: less a hostile rejection of mainstream life as an attempt to improve on it. For several 'natural' families a concern for 'family' was what guided the lifestyle, with the family seen as the core unit of society and the place where children should be nurtured, echoing Brabant (2003) and Collom's (2005) findings about family and lifestyle choice. Home education was therefore a lifestyle choice, something that was integral to, and often convenient to, a chosen 'natural' way of life, rather than being purely an educational choice. For these families the very existence of the formal school system, and the assumption that their children should be part of it, was problematic; it contradicted their perceptions of the lifestyle that they wanted to live and was seen to threaten their freedom to live it.

The rejection of mainstream culture and lifestyles meant that notions of responsibility tended to centre around an individualistic construction of society whereby each individual should take responsibility for themselves and their own well-being rather than relying on others. Natural home educators were therefore less vocal than other home educators in their construction of parenthood and home education as a responsibility as there was a sense that

the responsibility of the individual for themselves extended also to children as individuals in their own rights (Buckingham 2000). Often adopting some of the ideals of Taking Children Seriously (Fitz-Claridge 2006, Friedman 2003), Natural home educators tended to hold the view that children needed freedom from the state and from coercion in general in order to make their own choices; “no-one should tell my child what to do” was a frequent comment. The level of mistrust of the state ranged from a vague sense that the state was not necessarily acting consistently in the interests of children, to a vehemently anti-authority stance which was reminiscent of Althusser's constructions of schools as Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser 1972). Natural home educators' notions of responsibility were therefore based upon the rejection of sinister state 'interference' in the life of the individual who was expected to be self-determining and parental responsibility was therefore expressed through taking responsibility for the self and being independent of state coercion.

In contrast to Natural home educators, Social home educators took parental responsibility extremely seriously, seeing it as a process of interaction with their children and taking the view that children needed parents to take responsibility for them. They therefore felt that handing over accountability for their children's socialisation to others was risky. On the whole, childrearing (and education as a part of childrearing) was seen as a task that was to be undertaken and held by the parents alone rather than in cooperation with others. Echoing, and often citing, the home education philosophy of Charlotte Mason (1920) and mirroring the findings of Neuman and Aviram (2003), Social home educators (especially the majority who held strong faith-based values) believed that their children had been entrusted to them and not to anyone else:

> God didn't give me my children to give to the teacher down the road. I had enough of a problem, before we'd even contemplated home education, when it was time for my children to go to nursery, I did not want to give my children away, I really was so concerned that these children had been given to me and yet I was just passing that on to somebody else *(Janet, Interview)*

The conception of the school as a 'secret garden' and the power of the individual teacher over the children in his or her care was something that concerned many, echoing educational policy debates of the 1970s and 80s:

> you bring them up from birth to 4 and then you hand them over to other people and you don't know what they're up to, what's happening to them at all, so it's quite a big thing really, having to hand your children over to other people when you've had sole responsibility for them. *(Denise, Interview)*

This meant that sharing responsibility for their children's upbringing with the state was anathema to their values and construction of parenthood, echoing Lubienski's (2003) analysis of the US situation that children are constructed as being under their parents' authority. Parents were seen as the only people who were suitably equipped to determine their children's educational and social needs:

> we teach our children at home believing that we will equip them better for day-to-day tasks all round, being able to talk to

> people, being able to socialise with people, being able to do the academic things as well, but that we can provide that, being their parents and knowing them, we can provide that perhaps better actually than a school can when a child is in a class of 30 and the teacher can't spend that much time with them and she imposes, not imposes, I don't mean that in a horrible way, but she has her belief and her teaching, she will impart that to the child so we feel it's our responsibility *(Janet, Interview)*

In a similar way to parents who choose private education, there was a perceived risk that schools, teachers and peers would convey 'wrong' moral values (West, Noden 2003, Allatt 1993, Fox 1985). Social home educators therefore justified their choice of home education with the explanation that, in allowing others to have control over their children for a significant portion of time, parents were essentially abdicating responsibility.

> the more I realised that if you have children it's the Lord who has given you children and if he has given you children then he's the person you go to to find out what to do with them, and not the state, it's the, they are created in the image of God they are to be trained to recognise that and to work that out. *(Tanya, Interview)*

Children's morality was seen as one of their key vulnerabilities as they developed and the moral values of what was constructed as a toxic mainstream society were therefore of great concern to these parents, echoing popular

Christian home education literature such as Richards (2007). For Social home educators therefore, their responsibility for their children was total and devolving it to schools over which they had no control was risky. The ways in which this construction interlinked with their notions of childhood, parenthood and motherhood is explored further in Chapter 5.

For Last Resort home educators their sense of parental responsibility over, above and separate from the state was one that had evolved through necessity rather than philosophy. These home educators had experienced a breakdown of the shared responsibility with the state. Last Resort mothers felt that they had entrusted their children to the school system and entered fully into the state-parent co-responsibility relationship but had been let down when the state or the individual school had been unable or unwilling to meet their children's needs. Many of these parents had spent a substantial length of time (often two or three years) attempting to work cooperatively with the school system and often felt that responsibility had been abdicated by the other part of the partnership and that they had therefore had to shoulder additional responsibilities. Such experiences chime with Rogers' (2007) findings about the experiences and frustrations of parents of children with SEN in attempting to work in partnership with the school system.

Last Resort home educators therefore differed significantly from their Natural and Social counterparts in that, while they accepted that parenthood conferred a significant level of responsibility for their children's upbringing and education, they had held an expectation of co-responsibility with the state and its institutions. This kind of disappointment with the school system is not one that has received any significant attention from home education researchers,

although accounts of bullying as a motivation for home education are present in popular home education literature (Dowty 2000, Fortune-Wood 2007, Bendell 1987, Hastings 1998) and Ofsted's report (2010) notes that a significant number of home educating parents that they surveyed were both angry and disappointed with the school system. As also noted by Ofsted (2010), these home educators frequently commented about the fact that they were paying for the state-maintained schools that their children no longer attended, with a sense that they were making more than their expected contribution to their children's education, without receiving the benefits that they had expected from a reciprocal relationship. At the same time, Last Resort home educators shared the wariness of others (explored below) of official interference in their home education. This wariness stemmed from the analysis that if the state and the school system had been incompetent in providing the education that their children needed, they were unlikely to be any more competent in any involvement in the process of home education. While Last Resort home educators therefore often wished that they had some kind of financial or social recognition of and assistance in the education they provided for their children (and felt that they were paying for in duplicate), they frequently stated that they would only be willing to accept such assistance if it came “without strings”.

Home educators' notions of responsibility and the rupture of the parent-state co-responsibility relationship that I have identified were closely tied to the how they positioned themselves in relation to the state and the school system. These attitudes are now examined in greater detail.

Positioning in relation to the state and the school system

The primacy of responsibility for self meant that the disagreement of 'Natural' home educators with the notion of schooling went beyond individual schools to the systems of the state behind them. The state was seen as seeking power over their children's lives in opposition to their ideal of self-determination. This power was seen as predominantly negative and coercive, with the state and the education system perceived as essentially interested in the reproduction of a subservient and suitably skilled workforce. In a similar way to that noted in my assessment of the popular home education literature, these parents constructed conventional schools as an expression of an oppressive and controlling state using neo-Marxist discourses, describing schools as moulding workers and compliant individuals. Without showing any knowledge of having read such works, many of the Natural parents that I talked to espoused a view of the state and of schooling which echoed Bowles and Gintis' (1976) Correspondence Theory and Althusser's (1972) concepts of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses. As a result schools were seen as fundamentally problematic in their nature, coercive and denying individualism and choice; promoting conformism and obedience over creativity and the individual.

For many Natural home educators therefore, home education was, as already noted, part of a conscious effort to reject the pressure to conform to a tyrannical system. This often involved positioning themselves in opposition to the 'other' of the state and its institutional structures. They saw the state as seeking to take control of (rather than responsibility for) their children, and the willingness of non home educating parents to send children to school as an abdication of responsibility. In this context, home education was often expressed as a way of

keeping children out of the state's 'grasp' and reducing its power and also as a rejection of mainstream culture. This attitude was characterised, for example, by the activities promoted at 'Summerfest' (with titles such as “Creating a Nuclear Free Zone”) which assumed a particular counter-cultural world-view.

For Natural home educators therefore the threat to their children came from a sinister and controlling state and the dominant ideologies it promoted. The anthemic use of Pink Floyd's song 'The Wall' at Summerfest was a vibrant expression of this mistrust of authority and a wish to maintain individuality:

> We don't need no education
> We don't need no thought control
> No dark sarcasm in the classroom
> Teachers leave them kids alone
> Hey! Teachers! Leave them kids alone!
> All in all it's just another brick in the wall.
> All in all you're just another brick in the wall.

Social home educators took a distinctly different view of state and school from that of Natural Home Educators. On the whole they did not the find the notion of 'school' problematic; in fact many held very traditional ideals of how school should be structured and some tried to implement these in their home education. Others saw home education as a substitute for suitable school-based education, made necessary by financial or geographical constraints. In this way these home educators are comparable to the users of homeschool Charter schools in the US, as discussed by Collom (2005) and also fit into

Neuman and Aviram's (2003) classification of home educators who are drawing upon traditional rather than postmodern models of education.

For Social home educators the problem with school-based education was perceived on a much more local level than for Natural home educators. Although the National Curriculum and the structure of the school system, as well as the 'moral peril' of a degraded society were important considerations, it was the people within schools who were perceived as problematic, contradicting Apple's (2000) assessment of home education among similar families as indicative of anti-statist sentiment. For these parents the moral degradation of society and its cultural relativism were expressed in the values, actions and interactions of the teachers and pupils that their children had (or might have) encountered in schools. Teachers and other children were seen as presenting 'risks' to the socialisation of their children into the desired norms and values. For this reason parents sought to reclaim responsibility for their children from the power and influence of teachers and peers:

> we had considered home education, I think one of the things that made us consider it more seriously was the things that she was bringing home from school were contradicting what we were teaching her at home. Religious-wise, behaviour-wise, you know there were various things which even the teacher .... you know, for example one situation that happened was one little boy was pulled up in front of the class and told that he was disgusting, um, you know, and I don't know how it was done but I do know that Marion who was only 5 at the time remembered it very clearly and came home and yet we would encourage our

> children not to call people disgusting and also to in some ways humiliate them in front of a class. So it wasn't just necessarily things that were coming back from the children, the teacher had our child for most of her waking hours and so her behaviours were reflected upon our own child. So that made us think. There were other things, the other things were the religion, um where she was coming home and she was talking of other religions, which I have no problem with our children being told of other religions but when we brought it up with the school they were well we can't teach the children that there is one God, so of course we're teaching the child at home that there's only one God and they're going into school and being told there are various gods, they haven't got a clue what to believe, particularly at a very young vulnerable age like that as well, the thing that decided us was that Marion came home singing a song about “Helloween” as she described it, witches and ghosts and skeletons and various other things and I think that hit me through to the core. *(Janet, Interview)*

As the above quote shows, the concern for Social home educators regarding schools was centred around the interactions between individuals within the school and the influence those interactions had in socialising their children. The interactions within school were beyond the control of the parent and home education was therefore a means of regaining control and added another layer to their responsibility for their children, although some acknowledged that this could have its own drawbacks:

> I think one of the big drawbacks of home education is ..., it's this really intense father and daughter or father and son relationship, and it gives me a lot of control which I know I like and I have to think through, I like to be in control of things. I think it's actually healthy for a child to have this other figure who's a teacher and to come home and think well Dad says this and the teacher says that - it's part of working things out and I think we miss out on that. *(James, Interview)*

Much like 'Social' home educators, 'Last-resort' home educators often did not see the notion of 'school' as problematic in itself. Instead, these parents tended to see their individual children as problematic to the system or the system as problematic to their individual children due to their children's deviance from 'normal'. As posited by Fortune-Wood (2007) and supported by Ofsted's (2010) finding, Last Resort home educators perceived themselves as taking on full responsibility for their children from a mass system that was uninterested in their individual children's specific needs (many of these children were classed, either officially or by their parents, as having Special Educational Needs (SEN)). For all 'Last-resort' parents their children's individual educational needs, whether professionally acknowledged or not, played a key role in the decision to home educate.

Most 'Last-resort' home educators saw their children's negative experiences of school as stemming from problems within the individual schools that they had attended, often in the form of unsympathetic teachers or problems with bullying. These negative experiences were usually linked to their children's special

educational needs and the personality quirks or social difficulties that stemmed from those needs. The choice of home education on such grounds re-affirms Rogers' (2007) and Ofsted's (2010) observation that home education was often a recourse for families whose children had some form of SEN. Jenny had come to home education because of her daughter's health needs; they had felt under pressure to return Helena to school before they and their support nurse felt she was ready, a pressure which had a negative impact on Helena's health. For Jenny, home education was a means to provide education appropriate to their daughter's capacity, whilst escaping pressure from the school and the Local Authority.

Less common, and not reflected at all in the home education literature, were families who had resorted to home education because of their child's behavioural issues. Jeanette's experience with her adopted son George encapsulates the sense of different avenues tried in vain and echoes the experiences of families who eventually choose private education as a means of containing wayward behaviour (de Regt, Weenink 2005):

> George was in permanent trouble from the moment he moved in here really, I mean he was in permanent trouble in his previous foster home ... so then we moved him after a year to [local school], but he just went straight into trouble mode. And so yeah, so it was really a response, and then he got arrested for some long complicated saga ... so we thought stuff this and took him out and kept him away from them really, which worked perfectly well until he was 16, but I must say as soon as he went to college at 16, he just reverted to type straight away.

Home education therefore provided an escape route from a variety of untenable school situations. Many families used the term 'last resort' and talked about the length of time it had taken them to come to the decision to home educate, with numerous attempts to make school 'work' before finally taking the plunge. In several cases the child had struggled all the way through primary school (ages 5-11), with the hope that secondary school would be an improvement; the decision to remove them being taken in desperation in the last year of primary school or the first year of secondary school. This was the case for four of the eight Last Resort families interviewed.

As mentioned above, rather than perceiving the school system in its entirety as problematic, 'last resort' families tended to describe their negative experiences of school in terms of their individual child and the attitudes of the individual school. Lydia was disparaging about the way her son's primary school had handled his recurrent bullying, paying only lip-service to their anti-bullying policy:

> The primary school were no good, the primary school couldn't give a toss really, they sort of did what they had to do ... It would start and then it would start again and they would start back at the beginning of the policy even though it was the same kids involved instead of like “we got to there we're gonna start there again and then move on further because you haven't got the hint”. But the kids knew they'd got a good 6 weeks before mummy and daddy would be told and so great, you know, instead of “well we got Mum and Dad involved last time so let's go straight to mum and dad this time”. None of that. No, back

> to the beginning - no blame and circle time, which was getting nowhere fast cos the kids, I mean at 10 years old the kid knows how much he can get away with before he has to stop.

For five of the families interviewed and several other families I encountered, only one child had initially been removed from school, with two families later removing their other child when they also experienced problems with bullying. This demonstrates the way in which, for 'last resort' families, home education is very much about an individual child's experiences. Reinforcing Rogers' (2007) and Ofsted's (2010) findings, there were frequent comments about the perceived negative attitudes of schools and individual teachers towards their children's individual needs, with help being refused or a general lack of interest shown. Again this also echoes the frustrations of de Regt's (2005) research subjects which led for them to the choice of private schooling, although several Last Resort families had tried private education for their children on their route to home education. Anna described the frustration she had encountered when she had tried to get help for her daughter Sandy, who had got to the point of being suicidal, to stay in school:

> she was just in a mess, so I went in and spoke to the Educational Welfare Officer [EWO] and explained ... And I understand them but basically I was told that even children who have special needs they sometimes don't help because one teacher might have 250 different kids in a day and how can they remember everybody and, I understand that, I understand that the system is very good at that sort of big herd of people. If you

> fit into that herd you're fine and Sandy was on the outside of that, and it wasn't working. At the time she had a play therapist and the play therapist and I arranged to go in to see the EWO and the headmistress. Headmistress didn't turn up, so it was just the three of us there and I'd written an A4, sheet of all the different things that I thought could help Sandy. And we got to the bottom and they couldn't do any of them and the last thing on the bottom of the sheet was well I could home educate her then. And the woman turned round to me and said to me “well if you're not interested in your daughter's education then that's an option isn't it” and I thought I've just sat here for an hour and I obviously am interested in her education, otherwise I wouldn't put that at the bottom would I? So I took her out.

Hilary, Lydia and Anna, as well as others in this group, all described their children as different in some way - because of traumas they had experienced or learning difficulties; they saw their children as individuals with individual problems in need of individual solutions. The failure of their children's schools to find a solution to these difficulties was therefore problematic, rather than the inherent structure of the education system. This view was reinforced for Lydia and Anna by their experiences of helpful actions by other schools: prior to her disastrous secondary school experience Sandy had enjoyed her time at a local primary school, and Lydia had found her son's secondary school to be proactive in preventing bullying although she described their interventions as unable to eliminate the 'ingrained' bullying that had followed her son up from primary school and which had eventually led to him being withdrawn.

Last Resort home educators can therefore be described as being 'pro-child' rather than anti-state or anti-school in their attitudes, placing them at the opposite end of the continuum of attitudes to state and school from Natural home educators. Given the lack of specifically anti-state sentiment among two of the three types of home educator, it was therefore interesting to find that amongst all three types there was a fear of persecution by the state.

Fear of Persecution

In Chapter 1 I identified a previously unexamined discourse of persecution running through popular home education literature. This underlying discourse informed home educators' attitudes towards state and schools and their actions in home educating, in particular in relation to their Local Authorities. The discourse of persecution promulgated through books, pamphlets, 'research' publications in support of home education, and material on the websites of home education organisations created a fear of persecution by the authorities. Such literature typically had a combative tone, with an assumption that parents' wishing to home educate their children would meet considerable opposition from Local Authorities and that the state would use coercion, including the threat of children's removal for adoption by social services, to persuade parents to return their children to school:

> WHY I DO NOT WISH TO BE KNOWN TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITY
>
> - … because they deliberately and knowingly tell people they have to do things which they do not have to do BY LAW ...

> - they can't think outside the box of education=school, are not prepared to embrace alternative educational provision …
>
> - because from a point of ignorance they press government for more power to oppress us ...
>
> - because if they decide, on their criteria provision is not adequate they can force our children into school ...
>
> (Annette 2007)

However, upon close examination many of the accounts of active persecution of home educators that I was recounted actually seemed to be based upon the cases of the Baker and Harrison families, both of which occurred over thirty years ago. In both cases the Local Authorities' response to the mothers' decisions to home education was to seek to compel school attendance and as part of this both mothers were threatened with removal of their children. Baker has published her account of the experience (Baker 1964), Harrison has given numerous interviews to newspapers (see for example Scott 2006), both give accounts which depict themselves as home educators as refugees under physical pursuit and threat from the authorities. These were the examples that home educators knew of as they had been widely publicised and were often referred to, for example during the 'conference' at Summerfest their names were frequently cited.

Among a significant minority of the parents I encountered in the course of my fieldwork, the fear of persecution by educational officials from Local Authorities and schools was translated into an antagonistic attitude towards those bodies.

This is something that has not been explored by existing research although Apple's (2001) analysis of home education as a phenomenon is that is indicative of anti-statist sentiment .

This attitude was particularly noticeable among Natural home educators. During talks at Summerfest statements were made about “running rings around the Local Authorities” or “rubbing their noses in it”; websites that were promoted and pamphlets that were handed out or sold encouraged home educators to assert their 'rights' by exploiting the lack of power of Local Authority officials to demand information and the lack of obligation on home educators to provide information.

Many families seemed to expect a hostile encounter with their Local Authority, either because they were not registered with them, or through Local Authority 'inspections' of their home education. Lydia's account was typical; it started off with assertions about LA officials and then revealed itself to be based upon received wisdom rather than experience:

> Lydia: you know you have to play it and you soon learn how to tick boxes. It's thinking LEA speak - it's Geography cos he's got to learn where the hurricanes happen, it's science cos he learns why they happen, it's a bit of history cos you're looking at past, hurricanes over the last 20-30 years so it's a bit of oceanography as well cos it's how the ocean currents affect the track of the hurricanes, blah, blah, blah, blah. And so-on, so you learn to tick all these boxes and if you can get him to

write or look it up later there's a bit of English and a little bit of ICT. Yeah? You learn to tick all these boxes and say oh yeah we're doing all these subjects to the LEA and they go away quite happy.

RM: So you do feel that you have to tick all those boxes?

Lydia: Yeah, you have to play their game to a point as well, you have to. They don't, even within [county] there are some inspectors that haven't got a clue and expect you to have school at home and there are others that know what's going on and as long as they can see work in progress they're happy. Even within a county, and yet some counties have a hell of a reputation. There are some that make up the law as they go along and expect everyone else to go yes boss. And it doesn't happen and they start threatening school attendance orders if people don't jump through their hoops.

RM: So you've got a fairly good ... relationship with them here?

Lydia: Well, personally yeah, other people will tell you different but they get different inspectors.

RM: You tend to get the same one every time?

Lydia: I've only had one, I am technically overdue, but if they're not going to ask then I'm going to remind them

Other families also reported uneasy relationships with Local Authority officers; although none reported a negative impact on their family or any level of 'persecution'. Jill and Chris, for example, described at length their discussions with a variety of sceptical LA officers over the years, trying to persuade them of the value of autonomous home education and an unnecessarily negative attitude on the part of Local Authority officials is noted by Ofsted (2010) in its role as inspectorate of LAs. Jeanette did recount the case of one home educating family where social services had become involved; however, she felt that this intervention had been warranted as in her opinion the child was not receiving an education at all and the concerns included the child's general welfare.

Only Jeannette had in fact had any significant negative experience with the authorities; this had occurred during a truancy sweep where she had been questioned intensely and threatened with arrest. The Local Authority representative that I spoke to also felt that truancy sweeps were sometimes insensitive in their approach to home educating families, with some officials being over-zealous and lacking knowledge and understanding of the existence and status of home education. These experiences differ from the discourse of persecution in home education literature explored in Chapter 1, which suggests that most families experience some level of persecution from the authorities.

Other parents felt that an antagonistic stance was unwarranted, but appeared to take an alternative stance of appeasement, compliance and what they termed

'flying under the radar'. This was done by not registering with their LA or seeking them out in any way. For these families, their seemingly unconscious absorption of the discourse of persecution as well as, for many, the breakdown of their relationship with schools, meant that they were fearful of and reluctant to engage fully with authorities. Sophie used the discourse and hovering fear of persecution as her reasoning behind the decision not to register with her LA:

RM: And are you known to the LEA?

[Sophie shakes head]

RM: not

Sophie: I don't need to be, if Megan was in state education I would need to be, but I've got that loophole. And 1) because I was very nervous about home education and 2) about having a baby, I kept very quiet because I didn't want the added pressure and um, I was talking to Mike about it recently and sort of saying should we say here we are and he was saying do you really want to add that on top of everything else. So, no is the answer, it's hard enough as it is. So if I had the worry of producing reports and stuff

RM: you feel that would just be extra stress

Sophie: The icing on the cake!

This ambivalence towards, and fear of, authority stemming from the discourse of persecution created by influential figures in home education networks, influenced families' responses and attitudes to the outside world. In turn this often contributed a sense of being 'outsiders'.

Among home educators who took a less confrontational stance towards the authorities there was often a sense that parents who were antagonistic actually made their own lives more difficult and brought persecution upon themselves and possibly upon home educators in general. Several interviewees saw this fear of persecution as unwarranted and tried to distance themselves from those who internalised these fears.

> But people are really strange, they have a strange attitude because they think the LEA have a bad reputation of coming and telling you what to do or not being happy with what you're doing and not actually knowing what they're talking about and giving people a hard time well that's not been my experience, but I think it's how you go into something isn't it? If you go into that sort of meeting with a bad attitude then it's not going to go very well is it? But you know - they've got a job to do so you might as well make it pleasant. *(Anna, Interview)*

> Some adults that you speak to they have really poor educational skills and some of them don't even speak English very well, but they are determined to make an effort – and you just say yeah well you'll succeed then won't you. The ones who go well the school didn't do this, and the LA won't do that, and

> now I've got the social workers, you're thinking well I'm not surprised really - your attitude is actually - if you said to them butt out and leave me alone I know what I'm doing and I'm going to have a go at this and that, but obviously they're not - they're not putting in enough and you've got to put it in, it is hard work. *(Gail, Interview)*

This view that a cooperative attitude and the willingness to put significant effort into home education led to less interference from LAs, bears similarity to Petrie (1992), Port (1989) and Dowty's (2000) views that self-sufficiency in home education tends to lead to a positive relationship with officials.

Many could see the value of home educating families being known to the authorities in some way (whilst not necessarily wanting to be known themselves). Whilst all the families I spoke to felt that their home education of their children was 'efficient' and 'suitable', many referred to other home educating families they knew of who they were concerned were not providing adequate education for their children[22] and therefore felt that some level of monitoring and regulation might raise the quality of home education and ensure that home educators were in some way 'authentic'.

This variety of perceptions of the authorities' intentions with regards to home educators suggests that while the discourse of persecution put forward through home education literature is highly influential, that influence is not wholesale. However, the vociferous objection (see for example Education Otherwise 2010,

22 These concerns were more about the quality of education received by the children than any child protection concerns and often it was commented that the children of such families might be receiving a better education were they at school (perhaps the ultimate condemnation of a home educating family)

AHED 2011) to government funded reports such as the Badman Report (2009) and Ofsted's (2010) report on home education and to proposals for the compulsory registration of home educated children cannot be totally divorced from the underlying discourse of persecution that permeates popular writing on home education.

Home Education as a choice?

Thus far this chapter has explored home educators' attitudes towards the state and schools and their motivations to home educate. These aspects of home education are closely related to the area of educational choice. This returns us to the question explored in Chapter 1 of whether home education can be considered to be just another educational choice in the school-choice continuum or whether it is something different. Once again, this section considers all three types of home educator, however, it focusses more closely upon Last Resort home educators as a group who felt that educational choices had been removed from them.

While school/educational choice is a subject of careful consideration for many parents, the choice of home education appeared to be a more weighty decision. This was due to the fact that, while mainstream school-choice may entail significant sacrifices for families, either financial or time-wise[23] (West, Noden 2003), home education required considerably more extensive sacrifices (as explored in Chapter 7). For most families, especially those who had withdrawn their children from school, making the decision to home educate had been a

23 Financial in terms of fees for independent schooling, or the cost of moving to live near a desirable school; time in terms of parents' willingness to engage, for example, in lengthy school-runs

struggle in itself. This struggle involved weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of home education, researching resources and support and the legal position of home education. Several home educators talked about the decision process having taken months or even years:

> You get to the point where you think “why am I doing this?” [sending child to school] It's not the occasional tummy ache, it happens every morning: “I don't want to go to school”, “I don't want to go to school”. So , yeah I'd been thinking about home ed for about three years, but as a very distant concept not as anything that I thought I'd be able to do. *(Emma, Interview)*

> I did think about it several times through primary school, but by the time it was getting semi-serious it was getting towards the end of year six and I thought we he's only got a couple of months to do, just bite the bullet and go for it, it will be better at secondary school, but it wasn't. *(Lydia, Interview)*

As these quotes illustrate, there was often an initial period of 'gestation' where parents became conscious of home education as an educational choice made by other families, but without considering it as an option for themselves. There was then often a struggle of considering it as an option for their children and family before the final decision to home educate. This was not just the case for Last Resort home educators such as Emma and Lydia; James was a Social home educator who had gone through a similar process:

> we were on holiday in South Wales, near a place called Kidwelly and we went to a gold mine, and there was this group of lads, Caitlin must have been about 3 and a half, so it was during term time and I though who are you, you're not on a school trip, ... I thought “why are you here? – you look like an interesting bunch” and I asked one of them – “are you on a school trip?” and he said no they did home education. And there was something in their eyes that I will never forget, there was this spark of liveliness and I thought if I could just have children with eyes like yours then home education must be great, there was this sort of independence, and it's really hard to describe ... and I associated that with home education. But at the time because Caitlin was only 3, we thought well that's a nice thing to do, but we don't do that – it's a sort of aspirational thing, it was almost as if subconsciously we didn't think of ourselves as the kind of people who would do home education but it would be nice if we could. So a term and a half into full-time primary school I think I was talking to Rebecca and something that you didn't think of yourselves as the kind of people who would do, suddenly became “well why not?”
>
> *(James, Interview)*

This gestation and slow decision process is in sharp contrast to Lees' (2011) findings of a home education 'conversion' moment as something that occurs quite suddenly upon the discovery of home education as an option.

Whilst a few Natural home educators had made a conscious and early decision to home educate their children based on their anti-authority and anti-school values, many had 'drifted' into home education as a tangential result of their lifestyle choices. I met several families at Summerfest who had never consciously decided not to send their children (now in their mid-teens) to school, they just said that the 'right time' had never come and so they had carried on home educating. Selina, one of my interviewees, had started home education through her inability to get school places for her daughters when they moved and had then decided to carry on as it was a better fit for her family's lifestyle.

Social home educators had made a more conscious decision to home educate than Natural home educators, and their choice rationales and processes therefore resembled more closely the decision process of parents considering private education (West, Noden 2003, Allatt 1996, Gorard 1997), although with careful and more prolonged consideration of the sacrifices needed.

Last Resort home educators tended to describe themselves as forced into home education by the failure of the school system. Whilst the overall consideration of home education might have taken several years (as Emma and Lydia describe above), the decisions to act had, in the end, been quickly made in the face of developing circumstances at school.

Rather than being a long-term decision, home education was also initially seen as a period for recovery and recuperation as found by Rogers (2007). Often the initial intent had been to withdraw a child from school for a short period, a term or a school year, with a view to reintegrating them after dealing with the

problems that had led to their withdrawal. The parents' initial intent was to restore the relationship of co-responsibility with the state. Hilary and Beth's description of the gradually receding idea of a return to school was typical, Beth had been removed from primary school during the summer term of Year 6 (four months prior to the start of secondary school) because of bullying and had been out of school for three years:

Hilary: Initially we kept your place, 'cos she did have a place already booked at the secondary school, so initially we kept that and thought perhaps, that if she had the break, then she could start afresh. Although a lot of the same children were going to that school. But it was clear that she wasn't going to be ready to go back to school, so ...

Beth: I'd get left behind again

...

Hilary: And you were still pretty shaken by all the bullying weren't you

Beth: Oh yeah, I'd probably get bullied even more when I went to secondary

Hilary: Well, there you go. ...

RM: So you started home education

Hilary: And I think sort of within a month or so it became fairly clear that she wouldn't be going back in September, so we gave up the place. Although we did think then that perhaps she might go back in a year or two, didn't we,

Beth: Yeah

Hilary: We kept our minds open, in fact we've still got our minds open, but the likelihood of her going back now is pretty slim I think.

Beth: About that chance [holding up thumb and finger close together], not going back, no.

Hilary: But we never say never do we, because we would never have thought we'd be home educating, so, keep an open mind.

Despite this open mindedness about the possibility of school, return to mainstream schooling seemed rare before the child reached 16 and could attend a sixth form or further education college, something confirmed by the Local Authority official I interviewed. One mother had tried returning her daughter to school unsuccessfully, removing her again when she had started to self-harm; another family had put one son into a small private school after family health issues had made continuing the home education of all three children impossible, at the time of interview this was successful but had presented some difficulties and the mother was unsure whether school could be a long-term solution.

“Desperation” and “last resort” were terms frequently used to describe the choice to home educate:

> It was desperation really that gave me the confidence to have a go, I just thought “it can't be worse than this, if we don't try this I will never know” but it frightened me rigid, ... it was just the right thing right from the word go. It just felt right and I felt like we were getting somewhere, and even on the days when I had to lock myself in the bathroom while she was raging down here, I still felt it was the right thing, because I thought if she'd gone to school feeling like that then where was it going to end. She'd have either ended up, ... I don't know, being bullied to death or going off the rails and totally sort of going too far and getting excluded anyway. So even when things were bad here I realised that it would have been a lot lot worse if she'd been at school. So ... it was desperation then *(Hilary, Interview)*

This then is a very different form of choice from our usual conception of 'school choice' where parents have a number of different options to consider (Ball 2003, West, Noden 2003, Gorard 1997) and, when asked, Last Resort home educators did not see themselves as having 'chosen' home education, but rather as having been put into a situation where home education was the only option. Although home education had turned out to be a positive experience for the Last Resort families I encountered, their sense of a lack of choice added to the burden and hard work of home education.

In this sense, for Last Resort home educators there was a collision between notions of 'responsibility' and 'choice', with the breakdown of the parent-state relationship and the assumption of total responsibility for their children's education meaning that this group felt that any freedom of educational choice had also broken down. For 'last resort' families home education was just that: a final option.

> "I did it because I felt I had no choice. I did it because the system she was in wasn't working, I didn't do it, I would have rather that system had worked to be honest but it didn't." *(Anna, Interview)*

Conclusion

As we have seen, home educators displayed a variety of motivations for home educating and a range of attitudes towards the state and the school system. Underlying this, and fed by the powerful discourse of persecution promoted through much popular home education literature was a sense of conflict with the notions of state and school. This conflict was both with the notions of school-based education in concept and in the reality of provision.

The three types of home educator identified; Natural, Social and Last Resort, can be placed along a continuum of attitudes to school-based education which ranges from the concept of schooling (and state involvement in schooling) as problematic to the practice of school provision as the root of the problem. This concept of continuum is not one that has been suggested previously; it moves away from the classification of home educators into rigid groupings that

researchers such as Rothermel (Rothermel 2003, Rothermel 2011) object to and acknowledges the diversity of home educators without refusing to acknowledge their similarities and the themes that run through each type's motivations and practices in home education.

Although the rights of home educating parents and their children have been discussed (Lubienski 2003, Reich 2005, Speigler 2003, Monk 2004, Monk 2003); something not previously explored is the notions of responsibility held by home educators. For each type of home educator differing constructions of responsibility were integrated into their attitudes. Natural home educators rejected involvement of the state in their and their children's lives and education and therefore the concept of school itself. With an emphasis on the importance of the individual independent of others, and the individual as holding responsibility for self, Natural home educators rejected the notion of any relationship of co-responsibility with the state. In their minds, therefore, the practice of schooling is an expression of state interference and manipulation.

Social home educators saw the concept of school as unproblematic (often modelling 'school at home', as explored in the next chapter), but felt that the moral and social flaws of contemporary society made state involvement in that provision and the interactions inside schools morally and socially risky. They constructed themselves as holding ultimate responsibility (either to God or themselves) for the socialisation of their children according to their values. This, along with their construction of wider society and the state that represented it as degenerate, meant that sharing responsibility for their children's education with the state was not a prudent decision in their eyes.

At the far end of the continuum of attitudes from the Natural home educators, Last Resort home educators did not find the concept of school, or state provision of schooling, in any way problematic. Personal experiences had, however, led them to believe that the reality of school provision was deeply flawed and that their individual children were incompatible with the school provision currently available. These families therefore felt that the state could no longer be trusted to bear its part of the previously assumed co-responsibility for their children.

The outcome of this spectrum of attitudes towards state and school was the decision by all three types to view the state as in some way incompetent and to abandon school-based education in favour of home education. The combination of the view of the state as incompetent, the disengagement from the norm of state-parent co-responsibility, and the promulgation of a discourse of persecution amongst home educators through popular home education literature meant that state authorities were regarded with a high level of mistrust and often construed as a threat. Home education was therefore a choice which, unlike other educational choices discussed in the literature, took parents outside of the norm of school-based education.

Attitudes towards state and school, and notions of responsibility in particular, interacted closely with constructions of childhood, parenthood and motherhood. It is therefore to the constructions of the parent-child relationship that the next chapter attends to continue my exploration of the foundations to home educators' practices and experiences in home educating.

5 Mothers and their Children

Introduction

Having looked at the different types of home educator and their motivations for home educating, this chapter looks at the relational nature of home education within the family. Building on the understanding of home educators' perceptions of and attitudes towards state and school explored in the previous chapter, I move now to look at the constructions of childhood and parenthood that were key to home educators' models and practices in home educating their children. This is something that has not previously been done with regard to home education in England and Wales.

This examination is foundational to an understanding of the ways in which home education was carried out and experienced by home educators which unfolds through the rest of the thesis. A gendered division of labour within home education is identified, and through an examination of home educators constructions of childhood, motherhood and the role of fathers in home education, a picture of motherhood's centrality to home education emerges.

As home education, by its very nature, takes place largely in and around the home and therefore is bound by family relationships, understanding the constructions of parenthood and childhood is key to understanding the construction of home education. Hughes et al (1991), West et al (1998) and Landeros (2011) all reflect upon the fact that, particularly with regard to children's education, the terms 'parent' and 'parental involvement' tend to disguise a gendered division of labour whereby the term 'parent' tends to mean

and to assume 'mother'. This is something that appears to have changed little in the 20 years between Hughes et al's (1991) and Landeros' (2011) accounts. Home education was no different, in that my investigation of 'parents' on the whole brought forwards mothers as respondents and uncovered mothers' accounts of home education precisely because of the large-scale absence of fathers from home education. The division of labour within home educating families created roles that were highly gendered, with mothers performing the majority of the day-to-day labour of home education. Their relationships with their children were therefore key to an understanding of home education.

For this reason, this chapter focusses predominantly upon the ways in which home educators constructed childhood and motherhood (rather than parenthood) and the ways in which these constructions interacted with each other and formed a basis for the modelling of home education. Both the constructions of childhood and motherhood are examined in the light of the different types of home educator, although the similarities between the three types exceed the differences.

I start by examining my participants' constructions of childhood. Children are nominally at the centre of home education (Stevens 2001) and the constructions of childhood defined much of the mothering role. I explore the ways in which children were seen as both beings and becomings, as unique individuals in need of individualised care, and also as vulnerable and in need of protection. I then move on to explore home educators' constructions of motherhood, which are closely interwoven with their notions of childhood. Mothers' roles were premised upon the existence of their children and justified by their children's needs, their roles were therefore highly relational, and centred upon the nurture,

care and protection of their children. This relational nature created motherhood as a duty, with responsibility for the socialisation of their children. Motherhood and mothering were therefore centred upon the private sphere of the home and drew upon highly conservative images of the ideal mothering role.

Finally, as part of the examination of the mothering role within home education and its gendered division of labour. I look briefly at the involvement of fathers in home education, noting that both their absence, and their limited presence, in the day-to-day process of home education reinforce traditional gender divisions of labour.

There is an almost total absence of the examination of constructions of childhood and parenthood within the existing literature on home education, with a few exceptions in the US context (Stambach, David 2005, Lois 2009, Lois 2010). This chapter therefore draws on broader literature surrounding the competing constructions of children as 'beings' and 'becomings'; constructions of motherhood, in particular manifestations of 'intensive mothering' and related literature around the involvement of mothers and fathers in their children's education.

Constructions of childhood

The notion of childhood is crucial to home education; children are at the very centre of home education, whether they are seen as its subjects or agents. How home educators constructed childhood was vital to their constructions of home education and the ways in which motherhood, childhood and education intersected within home education. Stevens asserts that children are the focus

of home educators: “at its heart home education grows out of a perceived obligation. The child's needs are in charge, not the mom's.” (2001 p.85). However, I would suggest that for my respondents there were elements of their constructions of childhood being used as justification for home education and for their constructions of motherhood, as suggested by Lois (2009). As we will see, mothers' constructions of childhood created motherhood as a vital role and simultaneously hid the centrality of motherhood to the home education project.

When asked, home educators found it difficult to verbalise their notions of childhood. I therefore found that an understanding of mothers' (and some fathers') constructions of childhood had to be gleaned in a more roundabout way from their descriptions of home education, their constructions of motherhood (which were much more clearly expressed) and their rationales for their constructions of home education.

From these gleanings emerged a spectrum of constructions of childhood which all focussed around three interlinked themes. Firstly was the balance between the notions of children as 'beings' and as 'becomings'. This was closely linked to the notion of children as unique individuals, in need of individualised treatment and to the perception of children and the state of childhood as vulnerable and children as therefore in need of protection.

Literature in the Sociology of Childhood reflects upon the changing nature of childhood over history, with fluctuation between the construction of children as 'beings' in their own right and with therefore a level of competency to bear responsibilities and make their own decisions, and the construction of children as largely innocent and vulnerable 'becomings' in need of nurture in order to

attain the complete status of adulthood (Jenks 2004, Gittins 2004, Heywood 2001, Jenks 1996). The dominance of the construction of children as 'becomings', and therefore occupying a separate sphere from adults, over the past century has been challenged by changing technology, the growth of the mass media and accompanying social and economic changes which have brought into doubt the completeness of the adult state and have also given children more ready access to the adult sphere (Davin 1999, Lee 2001, Buckingham 2000). This has been accompanied by accusations that such access has created some children as 'monsters' with increasing concern over phenomena such as cyber-bullying and child murderers such as Thompson and Venables (Kehily 2004, Duerr Berrick, Gilbert 2008). A growth in emphasis on individual rights and responsibilities has challenged the notion of a universal childhood and brought about the question of whether childhood has 'disappeared' or 'died' (Buckingham 2000, Postman 1983, Scraton 1997). At the same time childhood has been increasingly lengthened by the lengthening of compulsory education in England and Wales and incidents such as the Dunblane school shootings and, more recently, the disappearances and murders of Sarah Payne, Milly Dowler and Madelaine McCann have emphasised the notion of children as vulnerable and therefore in need of protection (Kehily 2004, Madge 2006, Palmer 2006).

It is against this background of confusion and anxiety over the state of childhood that home educators' constructions of childhood and views of their individual children must be placed. Contrary to the dominant view described in literature of a being/becoming dichotomy with children as incomplete 'becomings' rather than agents in their own rights (Davin 1999, James, Prout

1997), my respondents' views of their children were much more complex. Echoing Lee's (2001) description of an ambiguous view of childhood, home educators described their children as being both individuals in their own rights at the current time, but also as developing people who were on a journey toward adulthood and beyond.

The different types of home educator varied in the balance of their perception of 'beings' and 'becomings'. Natural home educators, with their strong emphasis on the individual and self-responsibility, tended to see their children primarily as 'beings', already complete in themselves. There were many comments from Natural parents about wanting their children to make up their own minds and choose their own values rather than having values and morals imposed upon them by the state.

> there is a certain, it's a very gentle, gradual indoctrination if you like in a school environment, where certain things are expected of you and you take them entirely for granted that the teacher's will is paramount and they [home educated children] don't think that, they think their will is paramount. *(Charles, Interview)*

As shown in Charles' comment, however, within this notion of their children as agents and complete beings in their own rights, was a construction of children as still under formation and more vulnerable than adults to outside influence. This echoes some of the tensions present in writings in the Sociology of Childhood between the growing move to recognise children as agents in their own rights and the undeniable power of adults over children's day-to-day lives (Lee 2001, Kehily 2004, Prout 2005, James, Jenks et al. 1998).

Social home educators, with their emphasis on the moral and social training aspect of home education, tended to veer in the opposite direction to Natural home educators, placing slightly more emphasis upon their children as 'becomings'. They did however still see their children as simultaneously beings in their own right rather than merely incomplete, as illustrated by Tanya:

> it is just fascinating to see how very different they all are, they may look on the outside as though they are similar but on the inside they're ... a little chest of surprises really, in terms of what their gifts and abilities are. *(Tanya, Interview)*

Last Resort home educators were positioned somewhere between the Social and Natural types, placing a great deal of emphasis upon their children as beings in their own rights, but perceiving those beings as essentially 'raw material' which would be shaped during the journey of growing up and which, in the meantime, were vulnerable.

This perception of children as simultaneously both beings and becomings is perhaps an indication of contemporary confusion over the state and status of childhood as discussed by writers such as Scraton (1997) and Lee (2001). Selina's comment below about growing with her children, for example, is an indication of the move away from the construction of adulthood as a completed state in relation to the incomplete state of childhood.

Linked to the view of children as beings and echoing contemporary debates about children's rights and associated movements to give children a voice in both research and every day life was the notion of respect (Burr 2004, Kirby 2002, Lloyd-Smith, Tarr 2000). To varying extents, linked with their perceptions

of motherhood, education and the role of the state, each of the different types of home educator saw their children as deserving of some level of respect from others around them. By 'respect' I mean an acknowledgement of their children as unique individuals with their own preferences and therefore a right to their own 'voice', rather than constructing them purely as subjects of socialisation and preparation for adulthood. The theme of respect and agency in children is also strongly present in home education literature (Jeffs 2002, Dowty 2000, Fortune-Wood 2001, Meighan 1997, Webb 1999).

> I found it very stimulating to do it [home education] with them, and I got to know like, ... at a point you just go “Oh this is who you are!” Just have these little experiences of this is who you are, not just waiting for you to grow up, I am growing with you.
>
> *(Selina, Interview)*

Selina's comment illustrates a construction held by all my participants of their children as individuals in their own right, who were different from all other children. This strengthened the notion of children as 'beings'. As unique individuals, children were therefore constructed as having unique needs and ways of interacting with the world around them and this influenced the way in which daily life was lived and the pedagogical methods that were employed in home education:

> We've had a lot of challenges with Liam along the way with ADD, so, and I had this naïve idea that whatever worked for Harriet was going to work for Liam – rubbish! So he concentrates for like 10 seconds at a time and has to be very

> active learning all the time, and then Aaron again is completely different, so [home education] has to be completely individualised, which I think is one of the beauties of home education, that you can do that *(Denise, Interview)*

> you later realise that you know this math might be excellent for the one child, but actually there might be, the many colours in the book is not so great for the second or the third one, because they just, it's too busy for them or whatever, so you get to experiment, and you realise that sometimes you need to be able to be a little bit more flexible, or do something different with another child *(Selina, Interview)*

Drawing upon their construction of their children as unique individuals, home educators therefore believed that in order for their children's potential to be reached and for their child to have the best possible opportunities in life (both now and in the future) it was essential that education should be tailored to the individual child. This construction of their children's needs as individual was, in mothers' eyes, a further justification of their children's need for home education in the same way that Lois' (2009) respondents justified home education on the basis of their children's individual needs. It also echoes Landeros' (2011) findings about 'pushy' mothers in school settings and their attempts to enact 'good mothering' through the promotion of their children as individuals in need of individualised attention within the classroom. Repeatedly parents told me that their children (and children in general) needed individualised educational provision to cater for different abilities and aptitudes as well as to provide for

special educational needs. In accordance with their broad definitions of education, as already discussed, that education should allow for the full social and emotional development of the child as well as their academic achievement.

The combination of the importance of respect for the child as a being, and the reciprocity of the mother-child relationship meant that there was a wish for children to gain satisfaction from their learning experiences. While catering to the individual learning preferences of two or three children could be a challenge, as described above, this was something that my participants felt was much more easily and effectively achieved than in the average primary or secondary school class size of 30 children, an argument often also made by popular home education literature (Webb 1990, Lowe 1998, Bendell 1987).

> And that's the great thing about home education for me is that you're not having to do something at 30 kids, you can do something related to that one child, and that goes back to saying about [Caitlin] being bright and free-spirited, that a lot of what she's interested in is through conversation, she asks questions. Rebecca's a prison chaplain and she's asked a lot about Rebecca's work which has led to long conversations about crime and drugs and prison and government, and all sorts and you couldn't do that in a class, you couldn't begin to do that. So it's about developing what she's interested in, and spending time on that whether it's a long discussion about criminal justice or an experiment boiling up water, that means you can relate it to what she's interested in and energised by and understands. *(James, Interview)*

Ten of the nineteen families interviewed specifically saw their children as having some form of special educational need or personality difference which set them apart from other children and made home education especially suitable. These families echoed the experiences of families in Rogers' (2007) study who used home education as a temporary solution to their children's needs for individually suitable educational provision. The special educational needs described by parents ranged from their children being particularly intelligent or 'bright' (as expressed by James), to personal suspicions of Asperger's syndrome or dyslexia, to professionally diagnoses of special educational needs. Whatever their children's needs, the emphasis was that they were individuals and could therefore not be treated as 'normal' children:

> I always make a big point of telling them he's taught at home ... and why, not just the bullying but his own little personality quirks as well ... Always make sure that they know that he's not 'normal', whatever normal is – he's not what you would think of as a typical teenager, it's not like he'll be tearing the streets up with beer in his hand. ... he's different cos people have this they're teenagers therefore they fit in this box – and he doesn't
>
> *(Lydia, Interview)*

This emphasis on individuality can be related to contemporary analyses of childhood which identify the notion of childhood as a fixed construct as artificial and reflecting dominant ideologies (Gittins 2004, Davin 1999). However, home educators' strong emphasis on the individual, and the child as an individual separate from others meant that in many ways they were challenging the notion

of 'childhood'. They did not perceive their children as fitting within a commonly held construct applicable to all or even a majority of children. This discarding of the notion of childhood as universal can be linked to Postman's (1983) controversial idea of the disappearance of childhood as a distinct state and chimes with Stevens' (2001) analysis of home educators as at the forefront of a more general societal tendency to emphasise the individual above all.

However, in tension with their construction of their children as beings and unique individuals divorced from a generalised state of 'childhood', home educators were simultaneously constructing their children as incomplete becomings in need of socialising and formative experiences. Their view was that, whilst that socialisation and preparation should be tailored to the individual child, it was something needed by all children in order to prepare them for adult life.

Childhood was therefore not seen as a completed state and mothers therefore continued to construct their children as developing, incomplete beings, with one of the aims of childhood being the development of 'completed' adults (Davin 1999, James, Prout 1997). Mirroring ideas about children as 'investable' beings who, if correctly socialised would produce good economic and social 'returns' (Prentice 2009), all the parents I spoke to during my fieldwork were looking forward to and planning their children's futures in some way, as well as focussing on their children's present needs. Returning to Lee's (2001) notion of an ambiguous conception of childhood, there was a balance to be struck between home educators' perceptions of their children as individuals in need of individualised education and their construction of children as in need of equipping and training:

> But they have these visions and they see them as real as well and, in actual fact, so what for them seeing them as real? It may be in a few years time she might change and decide she wants to do something different, but that's why I say the core subjects for me are very important, that it's very important that they don't just give up on that. You know Molly may not necessarily need to know much maths to be a missionary, but she still has to learn it because she may not be able to be a missionary, you know, that's how you have to view it. *(Janet, Interview)*

All types of home educator therefore saw their children as in some need of guidance and directing in order to fulfil their future potential, although in Lois' (2009) view, this construction of need also presented a further justification of mothers' roles.

The combination of the construction of children simultaneously as individuals and agents in their own right, and as future adults in need of socialisation, served to produce a construction of children as vulnerable. A sense of preciousness and vulnerability is promoted in popular literature on childhood (see for example Palmer 2006) and draws on images of childhood that emerged alongside the rise of the middle class during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Gittins 2004, Aries 1962). Home educators, with their emphasis on their children as unique individuals, therefore saw their children as individually precious and worthy of the best care possible. This, combined with the notion of their children as potential adults, meant that they constructed their

children as vulnerable and in need of protection. Not only were their children in need of the best possible care and nurturing by people who recognised their individuality, but failure to provide that care also put children's future potential and wholeness at risk. This construction also drew upon ideals of 'intensive mothering' as identified by Hays (1998) and Wall (2001) which constructs the role of mothers as crucial to their children's development with associated risks should that responsibility be in any way not met. As children were still in a process of formation, there was a risk that that formation could go 'wrong' in some way:

> everything about them is precious and I don't really want anybody else coming in and spoiling it really, because I think they are precious and they are – they're real fighters, because they had to fight to live. Why should we then say well you fought to come in now do as you're told, sit down, do this, do that. Why can't we say OK using that fighting that got you here in the first place and channel it. *(Gail, Interview)*

Home education with the concomitant control it gave parents over their children's education, the materials used in that education and the social influences upon their children was therefore part of the process of protecting vulnerable children. Protection was therefore added to the notions of responsibility discussed in Chapter 4.

Social home educators, with their balance of emphasis on children as becomings saw childhood as a crucial stage in life, laying the foundations, both morally and socially, for adulthood. This contributed to their conception of

schools as risky places, as not only were children being exposed to moral ambiguity or socially negative messages, but were being exposed during the most crucial phase of their lives.

Last Resort parents in particular were unapologetic in their view of childhood as a vulnerable stage and children in need of protection. Similarly to Social home educators, Last Resort parents frequently described childhood as a crucial life stage. Last Resort home educators tended to see their children's vulnerabilities as stemming from their individual situations; their individual needs (often Special Educational Needs) and the ways in which others reacted and accommodated them or not. This focus on the individuality of the child' needs is something noted by Landeros (2011) in her study of mothers' involvement in schooling. For this reason, other children at school were often seen as an expression of these threats, in the form of bullying or social exclusion, whilst teachers were criticised for failing to deal effectively with the child's individuality and to understand his or her vulnerability, something also found by Ofsted (2010). Last Resort home educators tended to feel that their children had already been exposed to too many threats and risks, which had combined to make their children even more vulnerable.

At the same time as they emphasised their children as vulnerable, mothers were anxious to emphasise that they were not 'over-protective', wrapping their children 'in cotton wool'. Instead, in the same way as the justification of home education described by Lois (2009) they addressed this potential criticism by constructing their protection as appropriate to their individual child and as part of their parental responsibility. Home education was therefore a solution to a threat, and simultaneously a fulfilment of good mothering. Either consciously or

unconsciously mothers were constructing home and the family as a place of safety. Home educators were therefore unabashed in presenting the home as a place of safety, repair and restoration; and their protection of their children as a responsible action.

This view of children's vulnerability and need for some form of protection led to a construction of mothers as protectors. Perhaps the strongest and clearest expression of this aspect of the construction of motherhood came from Anna:

> I would have rather that system had worked to be honest but it didn't. So I guess, yeah – then you put your Lioness head on and gather in and try and protect don't you?

Anna's use of the lioness metaphor expresses powerfully the sense that children cannot be left as vulnerable beings to cope on their own and makes explicit the relational nature of childhood and motherhood. Mother's had decided that home education was the way to protect their broods. In this way, mothers constructed themselves as standing protectively and defensively between their children and any threats to them.

Constructions of motherhood

Built upon their constructions of childhood, and also moulded by the rupture of the state-parent relationship of co-responsibility discussed in Chapter 4 were home educators' constructions of motherhood. Although there were some differences in the ways the different types of home educators interpreted motherhood, predominantly linked to the notions of responsibility already explored, constructions of motherhood bore strong similarities across my

respondents and tended towards a highly conservative and idealised interpretation of the mothering role.

As Kawash (2011) notes, there has been little literature on motherhood produced in the last decade, with motherhood seemingly sidelined as an area of investigation. Hays' (1998)concept of 'intensive mothering' remains crucial with its identification of an unobtainable ideology of motherhood which centres around a need for women to prove that they are 'good mothers' who are totally child-centred in their activities and priorities. The dominance of this ideology has been built upon by authors such as Bobel (2001) and Wall (2001) with their analyses of the cultural pressures surrounding breastfeeding as an expression of mothering; and by Landeros (2011), Lois (2009) and West et al (1998) who have documented mothers' different forms of involvement in their children's education in an attempt to attain and prove their status as 'good mothers'. As Bobel (2001) reflects, there is a conflict between the power of such constructions to affirm and validate mothers' life choices and their power to re-confine women within the bounds of the private sphere and authors such as Miller (2005) and Gatrell (2008) have examined mothers' experiences of motherhood under the influence of dominant assumptions about motherhood. In the background to these constructions of idealised motherhood are ongoing accounts of the continued gendered division of labour within the home (Taylor, Bennett et al. 2010, Sullivan 2000, Vincent, Ball 2006, Charles, Kerr 1999), with Breen and Cooke (2005) arguing that the continued greater investment of women's interests within the home compared to that of men, effectively prevents any change by maintaining an unequal power-balance between men and women.

Home education is a combination of domestic, educational and child-care tasks, all of which, as illustrated above are predominantly the preserve of women. Following an expected pattern therefore, responsibility for home education and the labour which it involved was almost totally divided along traditional gender lines among my respondents. Mothers took on the caring and 'contact'[24] tasks of home education while fathers played more distant instrumental roles, creating a Parsonian (1956) image of home educating family structures and echoing Duncombe and Marsden's (1999) findings about the divisions of emotional and caring work. In all but four of the home educating families I encountered during my field work, the day to day process of home education was carried out exclusively by mothers. In only one family did the father take sole responsibility for day-to-day home education, in three others the daily labour was shared between partners with the mother taking the lead. These findings reflect the observations of Stevens (2001), Lois (2009) and Stambach and David (2005) of gendered divisions of labour within home education in the US, with mothers observed to carry out and direct the vast majority of home education activities. This lends credence to McDowell's (2000) seemingly uncritical assumptions that mothers are the implementers of home education. The gendered division of labour in home education in England and Wales, whilst not picked up by existing academic research,w as also a reflection of the popular accounts of home education in the UK, which are predominantly written by mothers about mothers' experiences (such as Bendell 1987, Mullarney 1983).

The gendered division of labour meant that home educators' constructions of motherhood examined in this section were closely intertwined with their models

24 I use 'contact' in the same way that it is commonly used to describe a teacher's face-to-face time with their pupils.

and practices of home education. Notions of responsibility for children were key to the constructions of motherhood, and were associated with concepts of duty. Just as important however, was the perception of motherhood as a relational role which centred on the well-being of others. The final key aspect of motherhood as constructed by home educators was its basis in and around the home and therefore its place within the private sphere with associated notions of protection and control.

Motherhood is a relational role, created by the relationship between mother and child. Like mothers in wider society, home educating mothers saw their role as a caring and nurturing one (Miller 2005, Gatrell 2008, Benn 1998). Having constructed their children as precious individuals in need of nurture, care and protection; the role of home educating mother was constructed and expanded to meet that need. The construction of childhood therefore justified home educators constructions of motherhood and their behaviours as mothers both to themselves and to others (Landeros 2011, Lois 2009).

Anna's view of herself as a lioness was therefore equally about her role as protector as it was about her daughter's need for protection. As a result, motherhood's centring on others and its existence only through relationship also involved a strong sense of possession:

> I haven't worked since I was pregnant with Daniel. I said I wasn't going to be a working mum - if I had to go to work there was no point having kids. They were my kids and I was bringing them up. *(Lydia, Interview)*

Children belonged to their mothers, while that belonging simultaneously bound mothers to their children and justified mothers' investment in them (Breen, Cooke 2005, New, David 1985).

The view of children as unique individuals reinforced mothers' constructions of their role and their individual relationship with their children as vital. Because their children were individuals, rather than fitting (or wanting them to fit into) a stereotype of 'normal', without exception all the mothers involved in my study identified themselves, either consciously or unconsciously as experts on their individual child or children. In a mirroring of Stevens' (2001) and Lois' (2009) findings regarding US home educators, mothers felt that they best knew their children's characters, personalities and needs by virtue of the time they had spent with their children and the nature of their relationship with them:

> But ME's[25] a bit difficult and ... I know my children, I know the difference between when they're well and when they're ill, but they [professionals] don't and you can't test for it so there's always that grey area – are they pulling the wool over your eyes? Well they're not – I just know them. *(Jenny, Interview)*

This construction of themselves as experts on their children directly echoes broader literature on motherhood such as that by Gatrell (2008), and Miller (2005) who identify mothers' development of this view shortly after their babies are born. This perception of individual expertise and knowledge makes mothers more willing to reject or contradict professional advice or opinions on child-

25 Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, also known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

rearing (Landeros 2011, 2005) and is also used as a justification of such rejection (Lois 2009).

Despite this almost all the mothers I encountered admitted that they frequently experienced doubts and fears about their adequacy as mothers and educators as they worked to socialise their children for entry to the public sphere. Part of the genesis of mothers' doubts and fears was in their rejection of professional and institutional input into their children's lives. Home educators' expertise on their individual children reinforced mothers' unwillingness to share responsibility for their children with the state. The state had no knowledge of their children as individuals and was therefore doubly incompetent to oversee their children's development. This sense of a power struggle with the state, as described by New and David (New, David 1985), contributed to perceptions of persecution as discussed in the previous chapter. For these parents the logical extension of being an expert on their children was that they were therefore experts on their children's individual educational needs. This expertise went beyond that of educational 'professionals', who were sometimes referred to with derision.

> if you then have the government giving you the money to do courses or exams, the fear is that they will then start dictating what you must do and laying down if you want your money you must do this that and the other, and it's not suitable. It's not always suitable. I mean you must do English and maths and this and that and the other, it's not always the right option for the child. If they want to do a course on pottery or sculpture or whatever, why should the government turn round and say well you've got to do English and Maths as well? .. it's getting away

> from the government dictating what you will learn and how you will learn it, because if it worked then we would all be in school wouldn't we? *(Lydia, Interview)*

> we're not deliberately trying to withhold education from our children really we're not, but I can see, I know them so well I can see what they can do, just by looking at her I can see and sometimes I'll say to her now shall we do some Maths and sometimes she'll say oh yeah and sometimes she'll say no and I'll leave it, and then when she's ready she'll do it, ... and that works *(Jenny, Interview)*

For these mothers, their expertise on their child as an individual with individual educational needs had led to a logical embracing of individualistic constructions of education with no common solution/manifestation. By their very nature, such constructions of education led to the rejection of the notion of educational 'expertise' as this was seen to be an attempt to impose conformity and/or mass solutions to children's education[26]. For all of the mothers interviewed therefore, there was a sense, to a greater or lesser degree, of 'bucking the system' and that, in having chosen home education, they were positioning themselves outside the dominant constructions of childhood and motherhood. Jenny described the relief she had felt upon deciding to home educate as it relieved pressure on her to return her daughter to school; and so ended the conflict between her wishes to be perceived by the school as a 'good' mother and her strong feeling that returning Sandra to school would not be in her best interests.

26 Although interestingly the 'expertise' of home education activists such as Mike Fortune-Wood was often accepted without question.

The existence of doubts and fears, however, suggests that despite this rejection, the powerful self-surveillance of motherhood described by Miller (2005) still existed, creating pressure to conform to conceptions of 'good' and 'normal' motherhood and reinforcing Bobel's (2001) reflection that in rejecting mainstream practices of 'good mothering' women may actually restrict themselves further.

The construction of motherhood as a caring, nurturing role, and mothers as experts on their individual children served to reinforce the notions of responsibility explored in Chapter 4 and to create mothering as a duty to be prioritised in women's lives . The different perceptions of the responsibility to socialise and to train their children by different types of home educator did not reduce the sense of mothering as a priority, with associated sacrifices. Motherhood for the mothers in my study, therefore took precedence over other responsibilities or needs such as paid employment echoing the literature on motherhood (Miller 2005, Charles, Kerr 1999, New, David 1985).

Motherhood for home educators therefore became a full-time job, although this was not always what mothers had intended. For some mothers, such as Lydia, the image of motherhood as full-time was something they had held before home education had been a possibility, for others it was a viewpoint that emerged alongside their practice of home education indicating some of the emotional work and sacrifice required by the office of 'good mother' (Landeros 2011, Lois 2010). Janet and several other mothers repeated more than once during their interviews that they had never expected to be full-time mothers now that all their children were of 'school age', instead they had expected to return to the careers they held prior to having children.

Although two of the mothers, including Anna, had part-time paid work outside the home and two ran small businesses selling home education resources, for the great majority of mothers interviewed, home education was a full time job in itself; with supervision of their children's learning consuming most of their time.

> at the end of the day my job is as a Mum, that's my primary job is that I'm their mum, and it's my responsibility to make sure they turn out healthy happy human beings, you know I don't want them to go through a factory to get a few exams, when it's going to decimate, well like Sam has, it's just ruined her health.
>
> *(Anna, Interview)*

Home education therefore became an alternative to a career outside the home. Home educating as a full-time ‘job’ was, in many ways, more compatible with idealised images of motherhood than paid work outside the home. It evokes very traditional images of a mother immersed in her children (New, David 1985). In many ways the mothers were evoking the image of 'the angel in the house'; a throwback to Victorian domestic ideology which created their role at home as essential in maintaining the well-being of the family (Gatrell 2008, New, David 1985) and was therefore highly compatible with the ideology of intensive mothering (Stambach, David 2005, Lois 2009). There are also, once again, overtones of a Parsonian view of mothers undertaking the expressive role of emotional labour within the family (Parsons 1956).

Especially amongst Social home educators who were Evangelical Christians, there was a sense that mothers were aspiring to a 'Godly' ideal of motherhood as part of their construction of parenthood. This is something that is also

identified by Stevens (2001). However, even among those mothers who did not position themselves as Christian, there were often statements about the importance of a mother's role as a creator of a safe home space for children and the fulfilment of that role through home education. The notion of mothers maintaining the home as a safe space is one that is part of dominant constructions of motherhood (Wall 2001, Miller 2005, New, David 1985) and this was expanded upon by home educators. Motherhood was therefore constructed as a role that was home-based, with the private sphere being the mother's area of work and influence, again invoking images of 'the angel in the house'. The construction of the home created by a mother as the ultimate safe-haven also explains the assertive response of home educators through organisations such as AHED and Education Otherwise to perceived threats of interference by state authorities where those threats seemed to cast suspicion upon the safety of the home environment.

Mothers' constructions of their children as vulnerable and the home as safe space under their control meant that home education, in returning responsibility for children's socialisation and care to within the home, was justifiable as a logical step to take. The motherhood-childhood interrelation was therefore framed around a protection/control dichotomy. As already seen, mothers were reluctant to be seen as over-protective or controlling, instead countering any possible accusations of such 'bad mothering' by asserting their children's needs for protection from possible mal-socialisation and therefore presenting the protection of their children as an expression of 'good mothering', as also found by Lois (2009) in her study of US home educating mothers. However, protection also engendered a level of control over their children. In a similar

way to Reay's (1998) description of middle-class mothers' limiting of their children's degree of choice of secondary school in order that their children might receive a 'suitable' education at a 'good' school, home educating mothers controlled the freedom available to their children as a means of protecting them.

Although motherhood was constructed within the private sphere, its ultimate role was to prepare children for the transition to the public sphere outside the home. The role of mothers was seen to progress from making choices for the child to guiding the child in making their own choices. The speed at which this progression happened varied according to the type of home educator. For Natural home educators the mother's key role from an early age was in providing a safe space, free from outside interference, where children could make their own choices free from coercion. For Last Resort home educators the mother's role placed far more emphasis on moulding choice-making opportunities to the individual child according to aptitude, whilst maintaining the safe environment of the home. For Social home educators the power-balance remained firmly with the mother for a much longer period of time. Age and maturity were key factors for all types with a sense that, once children reached a certain stage of development and were seen to be secure in their values and their own choice of moral code, exposure to what were seen as threats to younger children was less risky. Indeed there was even a sense that children should be exposed such threats in a controlled way in order to prepare them and enable them to live successfully in a threatening world which did not share their values. Despite home educators presentation of 'good mothering' demanding their lengthier involvement in their children's lives, the ultimate expression of 'good mothering' was the production of independent, well-

socialised young adults. This time bound and time-limited notion of motherhood is noted by Wall (2001) and Lois (2010) who both argue that mothers' perceptions of their current intensive roles as temporary both reinforces the pressure to mother well in the short time available and makes the sacrifices of intensive mothering more bearable.

Although Tanya spoke from her specific viewpoint as an evangelical Christian home educator and the language she uses reflects this, her expression of the mother's role in preparing her children for life outside the home was shared by all:

> to some extent yes, we do have to control their environment and we have to control the influences that they come into but we do have to bear in mind that when they get to 18 or 20 at the latest they're going to be out there in the big wide world, and when they're out there they need to have been equipped for it and 20 is too late to start being equipped for it, so home education has to be a greenhousing where little by little you're exposing your children to ideas they're going to be immersed in in the workplace and in a neighbourhood and prepare them for it to face it as Christians. *(Tanya, Interview)*

Whilst wishing to protect their children, whom they perceived as innocent and vulnerable, parents were therefore also pragmatic about the fact that their children would need in the future to live in the society that surrounded them. For Social home educators there appeared to be a fine line between protecting and controlling - and equipping their children to cope with the world beyond the

home and other home educators also expressed doubts about whether, at times, the home education environment could be too protective.

> I kind of think if you're just at home maybe you're too safe if there's a way of being too safe – you're not exposed to some of the problems that other children would have, most of Alison's friends I would say have had to deal with bullying of some description or another, they've certainly had to deal with- … so although I do want to protect her from all those things, I also want to prepare her for life after us – so there's a line there somewhere and I'm not totally sure I know where it is.
>
> *(Hannah, Interview)*

In this there was an expression of both the riskiness and responsibility of motherhood. That, although their children were born as individuals with different personalities and aptitudes that needed to be worked with, they also needed to be assimilated into a wider society or social group. As such, the children needed training and guiding and this was where their vulnerability lay and also their mothers' key responsibility. Such a pragmatic view of their children's ultimate need to live in wider society seems to directly contradict Apple's (2000) argument and Lubienski's (2003, 2000) fears that home educating families aim to isolate their children from mainstream culture both as children and adults. This difference may be one that is specific to the English and Welsh situation.

Where are the fathers?

As already noted, fathers were largely absent from my study. This absence was both physical (with only three fathers taking part in interviews and few encountered during observations), practically (few were involved in the day to day process and control of home education) and narratively with female interviewees making little reference to their husbands/partners and their roles in home educating.

The only specific literature addressing the involvement of fathers in home education appears to be Lois' (Lois 2010) article which found that fathers, whilst subscribing to the ideals of home education and being enthusiastic about the practice of education tended not to be practically involved in the day-to-day process. More generally fathers are portrayed in the literature as taking a peripheral role in the day-to-day running of domestic affairs, including child-care and education, which are perceived as being a mothers' domain. Landeros (2011) and Hughes et al (1991) describe the fact that, although 'parental' involvement in education is discussed, fathers are rarely present, with 'parental' being assumed to mean 'maternal'; whilst West et al (West, Noden et al. 1998) found that fathers involvement in their children's education was secondary to that of mothers except in help with areas such as maths which have traditionally been regarded as male-oriented subjects. Similar patterns are observed by Taylor et al (2010), Charles (1999) and Vincent and Ball (2006) in their analyses of the division of housework and childcare among heterosexual couples, with women undertaking the majority of domestic labour and child-care; although Taylor et al (2010) note that couples often did not see this division of labour as

'unfair', but rather attributed it to personalities, skill and paid employment, avoiding the notion of a gendered division.

Following the trends described above, fathers' roles in home educating families and with regard to home education were, on the whole, instrumental ones (Parsons 1956). They provided financial support for their families, and therefore for the project of home education and played a limited role within the private sphere of the home. Tanya, for example, described her husband's key contribution in home education as being his acting as an example to the children in providing economic stability for the family through his hard work running a nursery business. Tanya also felt that a key part of her children's education was learning about work in a practical manner through contributing to that family business.

The instrumental responsibility of fathers in home educating families meant that although mothers held significant power in the day-to-day running of home education, the financial dependence of the family, including the mother, upon the father created its own power dynamics as noted by Breen and Cooke (2005) in their more general analysis of power relations and gender equality . With home education being seen as part of childhood socialisation, this reflects the low status of motherhood and mothering responsibilities in society and the relative powerlessness of mothers beyond the power they hold over their children (Gatrell 2008, Benn 1998, New, David 1985). One key area in which fathers (in two-parent families) appeared to have exclusive power was in the decision to home educate. In all the two parent families interviewed, across all three types of home educator; where there had been a clear point of ‘deciding’ to home educate, the final decision or power of veto appeared to have been

held by the father, even though it was usually the mother who was taking on the main burden. This is a direct contradiction of Stevens (2001) findings, as he identifies mothers as the decision-makers as it was their lives which were to be most significantly affected on a day-to-day basis.

> Andy [husband] was worried because he thought that we wouldn't be able to cover everything that the schools cover and in the way that the schools cover it and that the children would be getting further and further behind and the only home education he had actually seen in practice was a family in Ireland where the children were very autonomous and they didn't do anything at all and then got to be adults and went on the dole cos they didn't have any skills or anything. So his impression of home education was that, and that's why we did it on a trial basis at the beginning.
>
> Then we had the LEA round and the report was favourable and he was happy then cos he knew we'd had the seal of approval, you know – OK that's fine, she's doing OK then – that's fine.
>
> *(Denise, Interview)*

These situations were typically presented by mothers as a protective action on their husband/partner's part, as are fathers' doubts about home education in Stevens' (2001) study:

> RM: I can remember you saying initially your husband wasn't very in favour of home education?

Janet: No, he wasn't and if I was to ask him why, he would say it was because at that time I had 4 children who were very very young and he was concerned of the pressures it would put on me, of having a baby and 3 other very very young children and also the fact that I was also nursing my mother at the time. He just didn't want to put any other undue pressures on me. And I appreciate his concern in that and I believe that that was right for Marian to be in school for that very reason

This power of veto over home education was on-going, even once home education had begun, with fathers often appearing to have a final veto over whether mothers continued to home educate or not. Sophie's description of the need for her husband's approval was not uncommon, particularly among Social home educators who were also Evangelical Christians:

> he [husband] put me on a trial basically, didn't think I'd last a week because I was absolutely awful at being at home with the children and also I was 3 months pregnant … And then the first half term went amazingly and he was stunned to see how it went and the children were so much happier children and Megan was unfolded and was far more loving, ... and Mark was really happy with it. But unfortunately his mother had a really good go at him about it, and being terribly influenced he started to say he wasn't sure, he might take them out and put them into a school, so it was all up in the air and then we talked about it

> again earlier this year after no parental influence and he was happy, he couldn't see him ever putting them back into state school system – he said he was far less likely to put them into any school than I was. *(Sophie, Interview)*

Again this was presented by mothers as a protective stance and appears to reflect gender relationship models that were dominant in the late nineteenth and up to the mid-twentieth century (Gatrell 2008). This power balance was most prominent among those Social home educators who were also evangelical Christians and seemed to follow from assumptions about the father's Biblical role as the head of the household. It was, however, as already stated, present in all the families who had made a conscious decision to home educate.

It is, however, worth spending a little time looking at those fathers who were involved in my study and who played a significant role in the home education of their children on a day-to-day basis. Involving four out of nineteen families interviewed (although none encountered in observations) paternal involvement would seem to be significant in a large proportion of my respondents and is certainly atypical when compared to the US-based literature (Stevens 2001, Stambach, David 2005, Lois 2010, Apple 2006). In many ways, however, these fathers' roles illuminate more clearly the interactions between motherhood and home education and the prevalent assumptions about motherhood and mothers' roles as found by both Charles (1999), Hochschild (1990) and Vincent and Ball (2006) when examining the roles of fathers in dual-income families.

Alan, Patrick, Charles and James all played a role in the day-to-day process of home education. Each had differing reasons for their involvement and therefore differing roles.

Alan's true level of involvement in home education was difficult to ascertain; his initial portrayal of his role was central, with responsibility being split evenly between himself and his partner Sarah. Sarah's portrayal of the situation was somewhat different, and as the interview progressed Alan admitted that his initial descriptions had been of their aspirations for home education and that they had not yet achieved this. Alan's position therefore seemed characteristic of the role of fathers involved in childcare described by Vincent and Ball (2006) where there was often a mismatch between expressions of willingness and the actual level of involvement and also reflects Stevens' (2001) description of home educating fathers as enthusiastic about the ideology of home education whilst remaining distant from the day-to-day implementation.

Alan and Sarah's roles appeared to be in a state of flux. Echoing Lois' (2010) accounts of home education 'burn-out', Sarah had become increasingly dissatisfied with her primary role as mother and home educator and was therefore seeking a role for herself outside of the home through various forms of part-time paid employment. Primary responsibility for the day-to-day practice of home education had therefore been handed to Alan, although with the expectation that Sarah would remain involved when she was at home.

Alan was fully committed to the ideal of home education. For him it was part and parcel of the lifestyle change that he and Sarah had made in rejecting mainstream society and dominant ideals of living. Schools were one of the

oppressive and limiting institutions that they sought to be free of in their search for self-fulfilment. However, Alan's search for self-fulfilment and and his embrace of the notion of personal responsibility meant that he had a tendency to prioritise himself over Saffron and Gemma's home education[27], again echoing Vincent and Balls' (2006) findings about contradictions between fathers' commitment to childcare and their availability. Sarah, although she espoused the same notions of individual freedom and responsibility for self as Alan, appeared to find it difficult to reject conventional notions of maternal responsibility. This meant that, although Alan was notionally responsible for the girls' home education, Sarah remained the driving force behind home education for the family, maintaining and extending a traditional motherhood role despite her attempts to discard it. The fact that Alan's commitment to home education was in a less practical sense than Sarah's had clearly led to frustration on Sarah's part and tension between them both, a situation also described by Lois (2010) in her analysis of home educating mothers' attempts to involve their partners in home education.

Patrick was unique in that circumstances beyond his control had both caused and inhibited his involvement in his daughters' home education. Following their initial decision to home educate, Cathy had taken the primary role in home education. At the time, Patrick had been employed full-time in a high-income job, meaning that his and Cathy's roles had echoed the gendered divisions of the majority of home educators I had encountered. Patrick had then suffered a debilitating health condition (that still affected him) that prevented him from remaining in employment. Cathy had therefore become his carer as well as that

27 Both Alan and Sarah described this as being the case

of their daughters and Patrick had become more greatly involved in home education.

Patrick was fully involved in his daughters' home education and clearly enjoyed his role. He favoured an autonomous approach to home education and his interactions with his children therefore followed an informal child-led model where he facilitated their learning according to their interests and also according to his specialist knowledge in science and technology. Patrick's variable health, however, meant that Cathy had to retain primary responsibility for home education and that her, more formal, model of home education was dominant, although it was clear that a level of compromise had been reached and that their model of home education was highly flexible.

Therefore, although Patrick had a high level of involvement in the day-to-day process of home education, this involvement could be described as 'incidental': it was important and substantial, but had not been intended and was therefore additional to, rather than replacing, Cathy's role. Patrick's involvement did not detract from the fact that Cathy had throughout maintained a highly traditional motherhood role (Miller 2005, Gatrell 2008), with key caring and nurturing responsibilities for both her daughters and Patrick, alongside the responsibility for home education.

Charles' situation in many ways represented the most idealised picture of home education as a non-gendered enterprise. Having taken the opportunity of voluntary redundancy from a career he disliked, Charles had been involved in the day-to-day home education of his children from the beginning and the responsibility for home education was shared equally with his partner Jill. Both

Charles and Jill worked part-time making use of their creative skills to earn money in a variety of ways. Charles and Jill were clearly in accord with each other about their methods of home education and presented a united front in their portrayal of themselves as sharing jointly the responsibility of home educating their children. The nature of their interview made it clear that all aspects of home education had been carefully considered between them, rather than one parent holding decision-making power.

At the same time, Charles' and Jill's roles in home education were different and, while it may have been coincidental, the divisions fell along similar lines to the other families in my study.

> Charles: Lois particularly looks to Jill as her mentor if you like
>
> Jill: Yeah, I've always done all that stuff haven't I? I mean the organising, if one of them wants to do something I have to organise it, Charles doesn't, even if I ask him to!
>
> Charles: Well, but on the other hand I have to maintain the computer network and fix it instantly if it goes wrong.
>
> Jill: Yeah you're the caretaker

Although this particular exchange was lighthearted in its description of Charles' role, it again delineates Jill, as the mother, taking on the role of practical organisation and facilitation of home education (Stevens 2001), while Charles took on the more instrumental 'physical' labour of maintenance of equipment .

James was the only father I came across during my fieldwork who had sole charge of home education on a day-to-day basis. He himself had not encountered any other fathers in a similar position, although he did not seem to be in any way intimidated by this and felt that his role was better accepted among other home educating mothers than it had been among mothers at the school gate during the short period his daughter had spent at school.

James had been the primary carer for his children prior to their decision to home educate. He had left a career as a youth worker which he had not enjoyed and had expected to return to some other form of work when Caitlin and Howard started school. As James was already the primary carer when the family began home education, there seemed to have therefore been an assumption that that would translate into his role as the primary home educating parent. His wife, Rebecca, had taken on and maintained the role of financial provision for the family by remaining in full-time employment.

While James' situation would seem to counter the notion of home education as a gender divided practice[28], in many ways his position appears to be the exception that 'proves the rule'. Firstly, as already noted, James was the sole example of father-led home education that I or he had encountered. Secondly, Rebecca's involvement in home education reinforces the theme of the maintenance of traditional gendered roles. Rebecca was far more closely involved in the day-to-day minutiae of home education than any of the fathers who were employed full-time outside the home. The first indication of this was Rebecca's request that she be involved in my interview with James, this was quite different from the total exclusion of fathers from other interviews, both in

28 And it does, in ways that will not be examined here

person and in mention. During the interview it became clear that, although Rebecca was not present at home for much of the time, her opinions on and input into Caitlin and Howard's education were extensive and that many of James' day-to-day decisions were influenced by her, echoing Vincent and Ball's (2006) findings that mothers tended to carry on directing childcare, even when they had nominally devolved responsibility to their partners. This also suggests that Rebecca still felt under some pressure (and wish) to fulfil the traditional motherhood role, as noted by Benn (1998), Gatrell (2008) and Miller (2005) in their examinations of working mothers.

Although Patrick, Alan, Charles and James were extensively involved in their children's education on a day-to-day basis, the nature of their involvement and the sharing of home education responsibilities with their partners actually serve to highlight the ways in which expectations of traditional gender roles and divisions of labour permeate the practice of home education, even where families may seek to reject these dominant constructions.

Conclusion

This is the first examination of the division of labour within home education in England and Wales. My research found that home education was a highly gendered affair, with labour divided along gender lines that reinforced traditional conceptions of mothering and fathering roles. The small minority of fathers I encountered who were highly involved in the home education process were an exception to the rule, and saw themselves as such. In many ways they served as exceptions that proved the rule, as underlying their involvement in home education remained gendered models and assumptions about parenting and familiar roles.

Echoing Parsons' writings of the mid-twentieth century and Hays' (Hays 1998) more recent identification of an ideology of intensive mothering, the motherhood role was constructed by home educators as expressive: nurturing, caring and centred on the private sphere and the maintenance of family stability; whilst the fatherhood role was constructed as instrumental in providing financially for the family and less centred on the private sphere. When considering the day-to-day process of home education, the motherhood role is therefore key.

Mothers' generally idealised and conservative constructions of motherhood were premised upon their constructions of childhood. Although there were some differences between the different types of home educator, with Natural home educators placing less emphasis on the responsibility of motherhood and Last Resort home educators placing greater emphasis on mothers' protective role, the key facets of motherhood were consistent. Interestingly, these constructions went beyond conventional constructions of children as incomplete

becomings and also focussed on children as unique individual beings with individual needs. At the same time, children's potential as future adults also rendered them vulnerable and in need of protection. Mothers' intimate knowledge of their individual children and their capacity to create home as a safe space therefore rendered their role indispensable. Mothers therefore constructed themselves as experts upon their children, reinforcing their justification of the choice of home education and the rejection of the parent-state co-responsibility relationship.

In direct contradiction to Stevens' (2001) analysis of home education as child-driven and child-centred, and drawing upon Lois' (2009) analysis of mothers' justifications of their 'good mothering' in home education, I argue that home education was actually driven as much by mothers' needs to live up to dominant ideologies of motherhood as by their children's specific educational needs. The close intertwining of constructions of motherhood and childhood and the nature of dominant ideologies of good mothering means that mothers must justify their actions as subservient to their children's needs. In constructing home education as centred around the needs of their children, mothers were thereby constructing their role as home educators as vital and justifying their extended mothering. The presentation of the balance of protection and control of their children was therefore part of home educating mothers' process of justification of their mothering role, highlighting the presentational nature of 'good' versus 'bad' mothering.

Home educators' constructions of childhood and motherhood were therefore interdependent, and these notions were carried through into an imagining of fully individualised education tailored to each child's needs and a consequent

rejection of a mass system of education. The construction of children as individuals, mothers as experts on their children's needs and the home as a safe space, along with the notions of responsibility and attitudes towards state and school discussed in the previous chapter, formed the foundation for home educators' pedagogical models and practices.

6 Pedagogy and Praxis

Introduction

In contemporary society the usual pedagogical role of the parent can be seen as limited, with pedagogical expertise being claimed by the school system and the formal education system therefore being pedagogically dominant. The home educators in my study had rejected schooling and, building upon their status as experts on their children, had set out to re-imagine education in an attempt to create an education that they felt was suitable for their individual children.

I have already examined home educators' rationales for home education: their attitudes towards schools and state and the constructions of motherhood, parenthood and childhood that framed their decision to home educate. Building upon this background knowledge, this chapter examines the ways in which home educators went about the day-to-day process of home education. I provide an analysis of their pedagogical models and methods, asking how their ideas and ideals that formed the background to the choice of home education translated into their constructions of education outside the school system.

Although fathers were usually invested in the ideological principles behind the home education of their children, having given their 'approval' to the project of home education (Stevens 2001), the refinement and application of pedagogical models and practices was almost exclusively the domain of home educating mothers with their control over the day-to-day running of home education.

The notion of pedagogy encompasses the aims, principles and practices of any particular approach to education. An examination of pedagogy looks at the process of teaching and learning and the aims that such a process sets out to achieve. A variety of pedagogical approaches have been espoused by educational theorists and practitioners over time and many have been absorbed to a greater or lesser extent into the educational practices within contemporary schools. For example, Montessori's child-centred construction of education whereby learning is centred around and led by the needs and competencies of the individual child, encouraging independence and self-reliance was originally revolutionary (Hainstock 1997). However, many of her ideas have now been absorbed into mainstream 'common-sense' pedagogy, such as the provision of child-sized classroom furniture to give children greater autonomy (Hainstock 1997, Montessori Jr 1992). Montessori's concept of play-based learning which is facilitated rather than led by the teacher (Hainstock 1997, Montessori Jr 1992) is now the principle upon which the Foundation Stage curriculum is based. Similarly, Steiner's (1982) concept of education as an evolutionary process, with children needing generalised activities to prepare them for the specific, can be seen as influencing Early Years education with its emphasis on physical play and creativity as part of ready-ing children to learn in a more formal way. Contemporary school-based education therefore makes use of a variety of pedagogical methods and approaches and learning may, for example, be child-led or teacher-led, experiential, investigative or didactic.

Pedagogical approaches such as the Steiner-Waldorf model, Montessori education and that of A.S. Neill as implemented in his alternative school Summerhill, emphasise the relational nature of education with strong

relationships of trust between child and teacher being paramount, as well as the child having significant control over their learning (Montessori Jr 1992, Steiner 1982, Neill 1980). Neill's approach gives the child total autonomy and avoids coercing children, by giving them free choice as to whether they attend lessons and participate in school activities (Neill 1980);. The short-lived free school movement of the 1970s[29] also espoused a cooperative, non-coercive approach to education which relied on parents being involved in the day-to-day running of schools, including providing most of the instruction (Kozol 1982, Carnie 2003).

A few home educators drew consciously upon the above models, mentioning Montessori and Steiner-Waldorf education as part of their inspiration. These tended to be those who had worked as primary school teachers, such as Gail and Denise. Others appeared to draw unconsciously on their concepts, perhaps as a result of ideas being disseminated informally within home educating circles by ex-teachers. These pedagogical literatures and models are therefore important as they provide a framework from which to analyse home educators' attempts to re-imagine education. Given the variety of pedagogical models and theories already available, there is a question as to whether education can be truly re-imagined, creating new pedagogical approaches which are radically different from those within schools, or whether any attempt to re-imagine ends in a re-working of existing models.

The ideas of critical pedagogy, particularly that of Freire (1993) are also relevant to the analysis of home educators' pedagogical models as they lend to an understanding of their views of school-based education and therefore what they

29 These were very different to the 'Free Schools' policy of the current government which is related to the extension of public-private partnerships in education, Free Schools were set up by groups of parents as a rejection of conventional school-based education.

were attempting to re-imagine. Following on from Neill's (1985) ideas about coercion in education and linked both to the rejection of state intervention in their children's lives and the ideas of Taking Children Seriously (Fitz-Claridge 2006, Friedman 2003) explored in previous chapters, Freire's concept of a 'problem-posing' model of education in opposition to a 'banking' model of education is useful in gaining understanding of home educators' aims, although none of my respondents voiced a specific awareness of critical pedagogy literature. 'Problem-posing' pedagogical methods encourage learners to critically engage with ideas and focus on learning that is relevant to students' needs so that the roles of student and teacher become blurred; as opposed to 'banking' approaches which emphasise the retention of knowledge without enquiry and the power of the teacher over the student (Freire 1993, hooks 1994, Allman 2001).

The chapter starts by looking at the broad similarities in the ways in which home educators re-imagined home education. Firstly there was a re-defining of education that broadened its remit far beyond that adopted by schools and a concomitant separation of the notion of 'education' from 'schooling'. This included an emphasis on 'life skills' and the amalgamation of education into the broader process of child socialisation. This redefining of education also led to a broad set of educational aims, the focus of which was preparation in one form or another for adult life. I then proceed to examine the different types of home educator, focussing on their ideological aims in home education and how these translated into home education practice. This highlights the broad range of home education models, from the highly formal to the very informal and ranging from being predominantly parent-led to predominantly child-led.

Broadening definitions of education

In order to understand home educators' practices in home educating, it was necessary to gain an understanding of how they constructed the notion of 'education'. Van Galen's (1988, 1991) US research, although now somewhat dated, is regarded as a benchmark in this area. Van Galen argues that over time home educators engage in what she terms 'political pedagogy'; in home educating parents[30] challenge the power of schools, both to label their children and to dictate the content and goals of education. Through their actions and their position outside the school system they both highlight the weaknesses of school-based education and become themselves more critically aware of those weaknesses. In analysing these constructions, as well as drawing upon home education literature and the alternative and critical pedagogy literature outlined above, I draw upon a broad body of literature from the Sociology of Education, including material around differing notions of success in education and also school-choice and private education literature.

As is reflected in the existing literature surrounding home education (Dowty 2000, Fortune-Wood 2001, Holt 1981), the participants in my study were very clear in their perception of a difference between 'education' and 'schooling'. There were occasions in interviews and conversations where I was picked up for a slip of the tongue and reminded that the two must not be conflated. All the home educators I spoke to made it very clear that education happened in all parts of life and that it could not be confined to what went on in the classroom:

30 This is the term used by Van Galen, rather than 'mothers' or 'fathers'

you don't end up doing nothing [because your child is not in school], you end up doing something because you can't help it and your whole life becomes educational, whereas before I thought education was just about school. It's not about that, is it? Education is around you all the time, we one day we just went up to the [Local] History Centre and had a poke around there, you just do things differently, it's just completely different to the mindset that you must get 10 GCSEs in order to be anything. *(Anna, Interview)*

Charles: well, we started home educating the moment they were born,

Jill: like everybody does, yes

Charles: yes, quite, we just never stopped if you like, I mean most people stop, no, they don't stop, they just have to limit their home education to the times when the kids are at home, out of school if you see what I mean. And they probably learn more then than they do at school

The clarity of this distinction between 'school' and 'education' allowed my participants to take 'education' beyond the confines of the formal achievement-focussed learning that they associated with schools and to create very broad definitions of education that encompassed a wide range of pedagogical aims, learning experiences and skill acquisition. This process, explored below,

echoes Van Galen's (1988) description of what she termed 'political engagement' by home educators with the concept of education.

Talking often in Freireian and neo-Marxist terms[31], and reflecting their attitudes towards state and schools explored in Chapter 4, home educators painted verbal pictures of school-based education. School-based education was perceived as constricting: preventing freedom of thought and discouraging independent enquiry or critical thinking. Instead schools were seen as promoting conformity, the absorption of specific teacher-dictated knowledge, and having the overall aim of the reproduction of an obedient and suitably skilled workforce. School-based education was therefore perceived as being inherently repressive.

The broadening of home educators' aims for their children's education beyond the perceived aims of school-based education was closely associated with their extended definitions of education. Some key aims were held in common amongst the majority of home educating families in the study whilst others were more divergent. My participants' aims for their children's education went beyond the acquisition of knowledge and formal qualifications to encompass a range of other things. Providing a new perspective on home education, I discovered that the home educators I encountered were conceiving their children's education as an extension of the process of childhood socialisation. Education became absorbed within a primary focus on socialisation, and therefore preparation for later life, rather than being seen as a separate process.

31 Again, home educators seemed unaware of the origins of the terms and arguments that they used, but, as with the discourse of persecution discussed in Chapter 4, these descriptions of school permeated home educators perceptions, possibly disseminated by home education activists and promoters who were likely to be aware of their origins.

This merging of education with primary socialisation is in contrast with the more traditional view of school-based education as additional and complementary to home-based socialisation. Although both views build upon the notion of childhood as an 'incomplete' state (Jenks 2004), the dominant view in contemporary society is that school attendance is a vital part of children's socialisation, where they learn skills of appropriate social interaction and start to make the transition from the particularity of the family to the universality of wider society (Lois 2009, Brint 2006, Reid, Williams et al. 1991, Parsons 1961). As we have already seen, home educators rejected the socialisation that school provided for a variety of reasons and this therefore contributed to their decision to bring education within the remit of home-based socialisation.

One ideal which ran as an undercurrent to all the home educators interviewed, was that their children should experience education as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end. This was an aim also expressed by mothers I encountered during my observations, and also present in popular home education literature such as that by Bendell (1987). Echoing the educational philosophies of Holt (1967), all those I interviewed, except Lindsay, emphasized their wish to instil a love of learning in their children. By this they meant that they valued the learning process as educational in its own right and felt that if their children were allowed to find pleasure in learning and were allowed to maintain their natural habit of being inquisitive, this would serve them well in later life, whatever they might choose to do.

> I think knowledge is power, and I think it gives you choices in life and opens up so much for you, I don't think it matters at this age so much *what* he learns as long as he knows how to learn,

> where to find the resources ... and I think at the moment it needs to be enjoyable. I want him to learn about the subjects that he's interested in, so we're doing the United States at the moment and he keeps telling me how much he's enjoying learning about the history and geography, and really ... so I hope to learn about what he wants to learn about, so that he can take that with him and when he's older and when he knows that well I've got to learn this now because this is my goal, he knows how to learn *(Emma, Interview)*

In a similar way to Lois' (2009) argument that home educators find justifications for their deviance from mainstream mothering models, Emma justified her non-National Curriculum approach with the argument that in following Ralph's interests she was providing him with vital skills for later life success.

A love of learning was also perceived to make the learning process more effective, with many home educators asserting in similar ways to Holt (1967) and Tooley (2000), that children learn more and understand more when they find the learning relevant to their lives and the learning is to a greater or lesser extent self-motivated by a wish to learn what is being taught. This was reflected in home educators' tendencies to construct child-led pedagogical models and to a greater or lesser extent to idealise a Freireian-style problem-posing model of learning whereby children learned through inquiring into and solving issues that arose out of every day life.

A consequence of the broadened definitions of education was that there was a reluctance by many home educators, especially Natural types, to divide

education into the discrete subjects typically found in schools[32]. Instead, following a critical pedagogy model of learning as an interactive process which involves engagement with the learning matter (Freire 1993), there tended to be an emphasis on holistic learning which was topic rather than subject based. This approach also echoed Holt's (1967) emphasis on the importance of facilitating rather than dictating children's learning. Even amongst the most formal home educators I encountered, only Hannah, whose daughter had followed an online US-based curriculum, and was now focussing on GCSEs[33], had not moved towards project-based work and following the child's interests. Home educators described the way in which informal events could provide learning experiences across a range of 'school subjects':

> Jill: And school subjects have no meaning for them at all, we've had to describe to them what these subjects mean, what is Geography and I don't think they know even now

> Charles: They're subject areas which once again the education system finds convenient, but in real life you learn a jumble of facts together, and you could say well that bit's Geography and that bit's English and that bit's social studies, I don't know.

However, in describing their topic based approach as critical and different to the approach of school-based education, home educators ignored the fact that a

32 In other families this was expressed through the adoption of extensive project work over and above more formal subject-based learning

33 The effect of examination preparation on pedagogical practices is considered later in the chapter

large proportion of school-based learning at primary school level is arranged around and delivered through topics rather than discrete subjects and that such flexible learning structures are key features of influential 'alternative' pedagogies such as Steiner education (Steiner 1982, Harwood 1979).

The reaction against the concept of a 'banking' model of education (Freire 1993) and the coalescence of education with socialisation meant that education was seen to be a holistic experience which encompassed every aspect of a child's development. This redefinition and expansion of 'education' reflects Van Galen's (1988) analysis of home educators as engaging in 'political pedagogy' as they reassessed the concept of education and therefore its practice. It is also in contrast to the narrower educational aims of choosers of private schooling who tend to focus upon academic achievement as a primary gauge of education (de Regt, Weenink 2005, Allatt 1993), although at the same time parents of privately schooled children expect such education to also develop them more generally with an emphasis on the development of social skills and 'character' (de Regt, Weenink 2005, Fox 1985).

The broadened educational aims of home educators and their blurring with the process of primary socialisation meant that conceptions of education did not focus primarily on academic skills and knowledge, but tended to place equal importance on obtaining 'life skills', an emphasis also noted by Barratt-Peacock (2003) in his research on Australian home educating families. The notion of the acquisition of 'life skills' as an important part of education was raised by every home educator I encountered; however their definitions of 'life skills' were broad and varied. For example, Lydia's son, Daniel, a very academically able, high achieving child, was seen to have made big progress because he had

recently managed to catch the bus into the local city, something which six months previously would have been impossible given his social fears. Life skills therefore encompassed practical skills such as cooking, budgeting, and independent travel, but also often included the learning of social skills enabling children to successfully interact with a range of people of different ages and backgrounds:

> I think that in our home that we can provide our children with a much more rounded education and also, with regards to moral and learning in general, practical learning, I think we can provide a much more rounded education than what they can in schools. I'm not saying that we're better, what I'm saying is is that, you know, ... we teach our children at home believing that we will equip them better for day -to-day tasks all round, being able to talk to people, being able to socialise with people, being able to do the academic things as well *(Janet, Interview)*

> I'd like to think that some of the social skills that the girls have learnt being home educated will actually provide them with a better grounding if they were to work in a large corporation. Because they are by and large learning things themselves, being able to think more laterally they're also developing social skills to a range of ages, Gemma's got no problems relating to people whereas at school there's that sort of anti-authority thing – you can only speak to people in Form 2. *(Alan, Interview)*

The notion of providing a 'rounded' education, as well as emphasising the knitting together of aspects of socialisation and education traditionally divided between home and school, in emphasising social interactions also alludes to the classical (and still present) notion of elite private education as producing a 'rounded individual' who is well-versed in a range of both social and academic matters (Reid, Williams et al. 1991, Frazer 1993, Roker 1993). The emphasis on life-skills as important in their own right, as well as a means to later economic and social achievement suggests that home educators notions of 'happiness' in education span and combine the differing definitions identified by West and Noden (2003). This is in contrast to West and Noden's findings that parents tended to subscribe either to 'happiness' as expressed in their children's current contentment with their schooling or as expressed in their child's likelihood of long term academic and economic success.

Eventual economic and social independence and the ability to make the choices these involved were seen as necessary by home educators and were the reason behind their emphasis on the acquisition of a range of life-skills as part of education. This reflected an acceptance of dominant constructions of childhood socialisation, with the idea that making an economic contribution to society is part of being a complete and competent individual (Jeffs 2002). Two families I met at Summerfest were encouraging their children (aged around 12-14 years old) to set up their own small business enterprises selling goods through eBay. They saw such an activity as both educationally valuable in terms of conventional academic learning such as promoting numeracy and literacy, but also as valuable preparation for future life and economic independence. Although these activities were individually tailored to reflect the

individual children's aptitudes and interests, such opportunities are frequently found within school-based activities such as Young Enterprise or individual schools granting responsibility for the financial management of school events to particular classes or year groups. There is also a dissonance here between home educators' rejection of school-based education as a preparation for workforce participation and their emphasis upon preparing their children for workforce participation through home education.

Drawing together the aim of education as an end in itself, and the aim of economic independence, parents were hopeful that economic survival should be something in which their children found enjoyment and personal fulfilment. Picking up on the theme of creating both long-term and short-term 'happiness' for their children that runs through popular home education literature (Dowty 2000, Fortune-Wood 2001, Webb 1999), parents felt that by home educating their children they were therefore giving their children the best possible chance of achieving their potential and enjoying a fulfilling career and adult life.

> Charles: Well everybody, ultimately I suppose they've got to become economically independent haven't they, that's what education is supposed to be for whether they choose to be poor and happy or rich and happy or poor and unhappy or rich and unhappy, it's their choice really. ...
>
> Charles: 'cos she's got a lot of talent in the music and art directions but she hasn't thought about what she'd like

to do to earn a living, she doesn't think of it in those terms does she?

Jill: She has thought a bit about it actually, she keeps saying there's nothing in art you can do that will earn a living, so we go through all the possible things and she has thought about it a bit ...

Charles: Yes, you've got to find your interests haven't you, it's a time for exploration and then when you've found things that really interest you then you go full steam ahead on those, and if you're successful enough you'll want to earn a living from them and you'll be in that happy position where where your life's work actually earns you a living. A lot of people don't do that do they?

Towards this end several families were in the process of negotiating the GCSE and A-level examination systems. The gaining of 'mainstream' educational qualifications was constructed by these home educators as a 'hoop-jumping' exercise, undertaken in order to gain access to desired specialist further and higher education provision which tended to require a minimum of five GCSE A*-C grades, rather than the qualifications being of intrinsic value and an end in themselves:

part of me thinks it's a bit of a shame having to jump through hoops, it's not much fun doing GCSEs – you know there's not really much fun involved in writing out essays again and again

> and again, just to get the right technique just to get through the exam. But it does open a lot of doors to them. *(Denise, Interview)*

Here again, therefore, the focus was on long term fulfilment in terms of their children's career aims and need for economic independence. This brings out again the notion of children as incomplete beings (Gittins 2004, James, Jenks et al. 1998) and also raises the question of whether home educators' long term aims were significantly different from those of the school system with its underlying objective of producing economically productive workers.

The integration of education into home-based socialisation and the emphasis upon the acquisition of life-skills meant that, in a similar way to that found by Barratt-Peacock (2003) and Thomas' (1998) research, learning and education had become a thread running throughout everyday life. Both Barratt-Peacock (2003) and Thomas (1998) found that for most home educating families 'education' did not have distinct boundaries from the rest of family life; either in terms of time or subject-matter. At the same time as education crept into leisure, leisure crept into education with games and outings becoming learning experiences and the boundaries between education and play becoming blurred.

> Jill: I think yes, a big difference that we realised early on is that they don't differentiate work and play as a school child has to, but for years they didn't use the words work and play, they're not something different. ... which is lovely I think

> Charles: Yes, if you can view your whole life as play that must be .... depends what you mean by play, they don't think of play as distinct from work, so play isn't play it's just something they want to do.

In this way, participants described home education as having permeated every aspect of their lives echoing Lois' (2010) findings that home education dominated mothers lives, often to the exclusion of all else. Several described the way in which they had started by expecting education to fit into 'school' hours. However, in a shift that was significantly more rapid than that described by Van Galen (1988), who described a time-frame of 12 to 18 months, these expectations of a school-like programme were dropped, often within days. Lydia described her son's reaction to her initial plans for home education:

> When I first took Daniel out I made a timetable for the week and I'd made lesson plans and he took one look at it and says “yeah [makes tearing motion] nope, not gonna do that, that's not gonna work”.

Whilst Daniel's reaction had been extreme, it reflects the overall experiences of families who set out home educating with and expectation of some kind of replication of school. In accord with Thomas' (1998) findings, over time these families had all moved[34] towards a more informal and extended model of education which integrated education into day-to-day life:

> Every school has trips, we just have more than they do. [laughter] Go down the beach with a bucket and spade or a

34 To a greater or lesser extent, with some retaining formalised aspects of schooling

> football, it's PE, at the best it's PE, it's socialisation, it's fresh air and if you can wangle in a bit of how the tide moves the stones and why we have breakwaters on the beach, then Geography as well. You learn how to tick the boxes, you take a day trip and you think it covers this this this and this yeah that's fine, I can sign that one off to education, no problem, even shopping comes under education – budgeting for Maths and living skills, writing the list is English. Oh yes!, I can do the whole thing and then you can cook dinner tonight it's domestic science isn't it, cookery, oh yes. *(Lydia, Interview)*

However, as Lydia's comments show, mothers still felt that these less formal learning processes still needed to be justified in relation to dominant expectations of 'education' (Lois 2009), demonstrating the ongoing influence of traditional notions of 'educational' activities.

Lydia, among others, also described the way in which even when she was spending time away from her family, she still found herself identifying educational opportunities for her children. Even for those families who followed a formal school-at-home model of home education, they found that their lives became more educationally oriented with educational activities stretching beyond 'school hours' and becoming part of their leisure activities:

> Hilary: I mean you'll sit and watch *Romeo and Juliet* and *Midsummer's Night Dream*
>
> Beth: Yeah

Hilary: And she really enjoys that, whereas I think if she'd been at school, you know they go through every little page and it would have bored her stupid, but she can sit and understand Shakespeare and enjoy it, just as it's meant to be, which is brilliant.

...

Hilary: And we went and saw Shakespeare for Kids, they did *Midsummer Night's Dream* and that was good.

Beth: And I went to the Globe theatre.

Hilary: But we haven't seen any performances there have we?

Beth: No, but I want to.

Hilary: We had a week in London that year didn't we, Dad had to work in London for a week and we said OK, if you're going up we'll have a family room instead of a single room and we went off and did all sorts didn't we, we did the Globe, saw the Lion King ...

Beth: We kept him company, ... it was a family trip.

Hilary: ... went and saw the Cutty Sark, so that was good before it got burnt down, and we went and saw the Natural History, the Science Museum

Hilary linked these activities directly to Beth's home educated status, reflecting that she had not done these types of activities with her older two children who had been educated at school. This extension of educational activities suggests that home educators, through their close involvement in their children's education became more aware of the potential power of educational activities and the cultural and social capital that these could convey, as part of their engagement in political pedagogy (Van Galen 1988). An alternative explanation, though less palatable to mothers who were constructing themselves as re-imagining education and distancing themselves from the mainstream, was that this extension of education was part of a more socially dominant process of intensive parenting, typically associated with middle class families, which involved significant maternal involvement in their children's education (West, Noden et al. 1998, Reay 1998, Landeros 2011).

As explored, the home educators involved in my study tended to have broad definitions of education which focussed on developing a love of learning, the coalescence of education and socialisation and the development of transferable life skills alongside academic skills and knowledge.

Differing problems, differing re-imaginations

Whilst there were similarities in the ways that home educating parents re-imagined education and their aims in home educating, there were also distinct differences between the different types of home educator. Parents' different perceptions of, and encountered problems with, school-based education, and their constructions of parenthood and childhood had implications for their

perceptions of an 'ideal' education. Their re-imaginings and constructions of education as expressed in home education were therefore affected.

Home educators' re-imagining of education was expressed in their day-to-day practice of home education. Methods of home educating varied widely from the reconstruction of a school environment and curriculum at home to much more autonomous approaches echoing other writers on home education (Thomas 1998, Meighan 1995). Although each family I encountered was in some way unique in the way they home educated their children, there were broad similarities within each type of home educator countering the views of those such as Meighan (1995) and Rothermel (2002) who have asserted that the motivations and methods of home educators cannot be correlated.

Similarly to Van Galen's (1991) 'pedagogues', for Natural home educators the ideological aim behind home educating was primarily the fostering of freedom of thought within their children, although they did not share Van Galen's pedagogues' focus on academic achievement and learning. A consequence of their rejection of the structures of state and school was that Natural home educators wanted their children to be independent of the pressure for conformity and obedience that they perceived to exist in schools and wider society. For many Natural home educators this meant a rejection of a materialistic and consumerist society. Values often included a deep concern for ecologically friendly living and sustainability and also a search for individual fulfilment and these were expressed within their constructions of education as part of their lifestyle choice. Sarah unwittingly echoed Freire's (1993) expression of a coercive 'banking' model of education:

> children are seen as empty vessels to be filled up, and I don't see that they are that, I think, my understanding is that they are quite full up and that we empty them in a way, they have lots of innate and intuitive things and you actually systematically get rid of that through systems and structures and things.

Natural home educators, in line with their emphasis on individualism and freedom from outside control, therefore tended towards more autonomous forms of home education. Many aimed for a pedagogical ideal of 'autonomous' education, as outlined and promoted by the Fortune-Woods (Fortune-Wood 2001, Fortune-Wood 2005) and based on principles put forward by Holt (1981, 1967, 1984). The ideal of autonomous home education is for it to be entirely child-led and child-centred with the child initiating learning and investigation according to their interests and inclination. Autonomous pedagogy closely mirrors the critical pedagogy espoused by authors such as Freire (1993) and hooks (1994) with the elimination of segregated and hierarchical roles of teacher and pupil and the abandonment of dictated learning objectives. Natural home educators therefore argued that their children would attain skills such as reading, writing and numeracy as and when they saw the need for it and that learning will therefore be meaningful rather than forced with children learning key skills about how to learn rather than focussing on specific subject material. This model of non-coercive learning bears similarities to the educational philosophy of A.S. Neill as implemented in his alternative school 'Summerhill' (Neill 1980). Neill's model of lessons which were available but not compulsory allows children to engage with knowledge and skills as and when they feel they are necessary (Neill 1980, Segefjord 1970), however, Natural home educators

differed from Neill, firstly in seeing themselves as mothers as integral to the educational process (Neill described parents as 'damaging' their children educationally), and secondly in that whereas Summerhill's teaching is largely traditional and didactic where students choose to engage with it (Ofsted 1999), Natural home educators extended the notion of autonomy beyond the choice of whether to learn, to the process of learning.

In this context home educators constructed their children as agents in the learning process, echoing both alternative pedagogical literature and popular home education literature that promotes child-led pedagogy (Dowty 2000, Kirkman 2005, Meighan 1997). Liza described the occasion when Amber had acquired a pet terrapin and had needed to put the correct quantities of chemicals in its tank. This had required them to work out the volume of water in the tank and Liza described the way in which Amber had worked this out without any formal teaching and acquired an understanding of the mathematical concept of volume in the process.

Alan talked about the ways in which Gemma and Sage's discoveries on country walks could lead to a wide-ranging enquiry, following their line of interest and covering and integrating a wide-range of 'subjects'; and Cathy and Patrick who were Natural home educators, but were not aiming for fully autonomous home education described the ways in which they fed and guided their daughters' interests:

> Patrick: Left to her own devices though, she'll often look things up and research stuff that she's curious about – like how does an atom bomb work – because of something

that's been on the news or whatever and so then we have a big discussion about nuclear fission and the like and the difference between that and fusion and all the rest of it, and there's a good site on how stuff works, with nice diagrams and so she explores her curiosities. So she's pretty good at that.

Cathy: They're all building up a list of bookmarks on my computer of, on the browser of places they like to go to, Alana's got a huge list, I keep adding the odd thing on to it and wondering whether she'll notice I've put it there and think ooh that looks interesting

Patrick: breadcrumbs

Cathy: A recent one I found was an introduction to DNA, she's interested in genetics, so I've put that on there and I'm waiting to see how long it takes her to notice it. If she doesn't notice it in the next couple of week I shall probably say “oh have you spotted this?”.

It is worth noting, however, that these encouragements of discovery and learning within everyday home life are also facets of middle class transferance of educational and cultural capital and are often attributed as the reason for the educational success of middle class children (Reay 1998, Bourdieu 1997, Ball, Bowe et al. 1997).

Beth described to me the autonomous, child-led education that was her ideal. She then rather guiltily (her own description) extracted a “teach your children to read” book from under her sofa and explained that it was very formal and didactic but that using it had worked with both of her sons when they had been slow to learn to read of their own accord. Mothers often felt therefore, that while totally autonomous education was their ideal for their children, they were unable to divorce themselves completely from the models of education and schooling that they had been brought up with (something also noted by Thomas (1998)). As a result they tended towards a model of home education that was highly child-centred and informal, offering the child a great deal of, but not total, autonomy.

> [talking about the Kumon maths programme] that's Gemma's choice and we started it with Saffron alongside Gemma, so that's been more our choice. Which has been very good overall. … so that goes on daily and Kumon's a good example of how we do home education because with Gemma she wants to do it, so Alan followed that up and started it and then had trouble with it recently, so there are responsibility issues for her and for us in knowing where we own it and where she owns it. So what we've tried for the last 2 months is to leave her to it - she's chosen to do it therefore let's see how well she does, she's got to do it every day – it's about 10 minutes, she's been having trouble with that and she's been leaving 3 or 4 to the last day and then doing them all at once and eventually she's gone right down with it and she doesn't want to do it and

> it's too hard for her, too difficult. So I've, we've had a chat me and Alan, and I've pulled the reigns in, and now I'm saying that she has to do it every morning, so I'm doing more of the ownership. *(Sarah, Interview)*

Although several mothers talked about other families they knew whose children were totally autonomously educated (an ideal to which many aspired), none of the families I encountered followed a totally autonomous form of education. This appears to be in contradiction to the popular literature on home education in England and Wales which tends to portray autonomous approaches as dominant (see for example Dowty 2000). This contradiction suggests that there may have been a degree of impression management, not just by home educating mothers to outsiders to justify their home education as 'good mothering' (Lois, 2009), but also between home educators in an attempt to live up to the ideals of autonomous home education put forward by the literature. All parents imposed some areas of study or 'nagging' their children to achieve targets:

> Jill: Luisa has lots of things that she's been aiming for like her exams and music and stuff then she sees the need to work in a more organised way so, I can suggest that we do half an hour of theory a day or something like that and she'll then follow it. So it's changed in that it's still child-led but it's us suggesting how she gets to the aim that she's chosen. ...
>
> Charles: You still need to nag though

Jill: there's a certain amount of nagging still

Charles: Cos they're not ready to do something when you'd like them to do it, they don't see the commitment as one of well I must do it at 10 o'clock, Luisa will say “well I'll feel more energetic in the evening”. And they're like adults, they procrastinate, because practise, for example, is hard work, yes, that's human nature.

Despite espousing the ideal that their children should have free choice and several claiming that their child should not be told what to do by anyone, these mothers still continued to have extensive control and influence over their children’s learning. Rather than completely autonomous home education, therefore, what these families tended to practise was a highly child-centred, child-led model of education where the children's interests were picked up upon, encouraged and their learning facilitated by their mothers. This approach was then supplemented by home educators directing their children's learning in areas which they thought were particularly important; usually in the areas of literacy and numeracy, areas which are also emphasised in school-based education.

It is also notable that, where an autonomous approach was espoused, older children appeared to be focussing on and specialising in subject areas that their parents were themselves specialists in. For example, Charles and Jill's children were both focussing on the creative subjects of fine art and music, directly following Jill's professional speicalism as a music teacher and the special interest of both parents in fine art. This suggested that, despite the wish to

broaden the educational experiences of their children by giving them 'free range' in their educational choices, parents were possibly unintentionally narrowing their children's opportunities and experiences by limiting their exposure to alternatives[35]. This is an interesting and yet contradictory echo of the concerns of Apple (2000) and Lubienski (2003, 2000) (who focus on formal, religiously motivated home educators in the US) that home educators who set out to dictate their children's learning environment and materials narrow those children's opportunities to choose alternative lifestyles and interests.

The relationship of Natural home educators to further and higher education was also unclear. Whilst parents were clear that formal qualifications were unnecessary and were also part of an oppressive education system, there was simultaneously an ambition among many parents for their children to gain further and higher education qualifications. In fact many Natural home educators that I spoke to, particularly at 'Summerfest' had children who were already enrolled in externally examined courses at local further education colleges, and the subject of university entrance without formal qualifications was a frequent topic of conversation. This seemed to mark some kind of inconsistency in their philosophy of rejection of formal education, especially in families who were often in many other ways determined to live a lifestyle which rejected most of the trappings of conventional contemporary society.

Whilst Natural home educators favoured autonomous, child-led pedagogical models and practices, Social home educators tended towards more formalised practices. In accordance with their construction of schools as morally risky

35 This was a possibility that Charles acknowledged, saying that although they had made efforts to expose their children to a range of career possibilities they had been limited by their social circle which was mainly limited to other home educators who shared similar interests.

places where their children's interactions were out of their control, the chief ideological aim of Social mothers in home educating was to protect their children from moral and social threat by keeping them within the safety of the home environment and facilitating their appropriate socialisation. The particular emphasis among Social home educators upon education as an extension of, and integral to, children's socialisation meant that there was a particular focus upon the moral and social preparation of children for adult life, echoing the accounts of Richards (2007) and Stevens (2001) of similarly motivated home educators.

Raising once again, the tension between protection and control, 'Social' mothers argued that, in protecting their children from certain moral influences and using home education as a vessel for inculcating their children with a particular world-view, they were not restricting their children's learning opportunities:

> it's preparing and equipping them. So for example, we did a thing on bullying, we looked at bullying, we looked at examples of bullying, we looked at it in the papers, we looked at it in the news, where was bullying, what was bullying, why was it bullying? Then we looked at well how should we deal with bullying, how should we deal with it if someone was bullying us? Why is bullying wrong, but not only do we look at it from the well its wrong because you're being unkind, but it is also looking at it from the perspective, from the Biblical perspective – that in the Bible we are instructed not to be, and looking for examples in the Bible of where, so you can link the whole lot together. So

> protecting I wouldn't necessarily describe, I would describe it as equipping. Controlling? ... I would say it is more a preparing, it's actually a preparatory thing for them to be able to live adult lives in society. *(Janet, Interview)*

The responsibility of this preparation and Social home educators' general lack of issue with the notion of school *per se* meant that they had a tendency towards a formal model of home education and also that education was predominantly parent-led rather than child-led. Collom (2005), Thomas (1998) and Van Galen (1991) have also noted that where home educators do not disapprove of the notion of 'school', they tend to practice more structured forms of home education, although, unlike Van Galen's (1991) and Collom's (2005) findings, in my study formalised educational structures were not solely associated with religiously motivated home education.

Social home educators were the most likely to refer to themselves as 'homeschooling' rather than 'home educating', signifying both their lack of antipathy to the notion of school and their frequent use of American home education materials. Similarly to Van Galen's (1988) 'Ideologues', most created some form of 'school at home' and/or made use of formal curricula, a model of home education that has not been extensively documented in England and Wales.

Janet, Tanya and Sophie each had what they referred to as a 'school-room' set aside for education (although Tanya's also doubled as a dining room). Janet's school room was complete with desks, chairs and cupboards typical of a modern primary school classroom and both Janet and Sophie's children wore a

form of school uniform (although Sophie said that theirs was often abandoned). Although Van Galen (Van Galen 1988) describes such practices as indicative of a lack of critical engagement with the notion of education, I would argue that these respondents were no less critically engaged with the notion of education than others of my respondents, but that as their critical engagement regarded the interactions surrounding education rather than the structures this was also reflected in their practices in home educating.

Most other social families were significantly less formal than Janet, Tanya and Sophie with formalised learning happening at the dining table or, for Hannah's daughter who had been following a computer-based curriculum, at the computer. Many of the Social families still constructed some sort of weekly educational timetable, reminiscent of those found in schools, with study divided into discrete subjects and using some form of published curriculum for loose guidance for at least the core subjects of Maths and English. Although academic learning was important, the social and moral context of that academic learning was seen as being central to their children's education and this meant that, like the other home educators in my study, Social home educators constructed education in a very broad manner.

All the Social mothers I encountered valued the flexibility which home education afforded them. This meant that they could follow children's interests to some extent and abandon the curriculum and self-imposed timetable for impromptu activities that they felt were important or enjoyable or towards the end of terms[36].

36 all the families I spoke to tended to follow school term-times to some extent as these tended to dictate the availability of children's activities

> And if it's a really nice day and people are really a bit jaded you can just say OK let's just go out, let's just go and have a walk somewhere and, um, we probably do that less now than we did when there were fewer children, because what we're doing now is much more formal but we used to do a terrific lot of reading aloud. I'd used to aim to read aloud for an hour and then I'd get to where I'd think I was going to stop and they'd say "More! More! More!" and you kept going *(Tanya, Interview)*

Even those following formal curricula and a 'school-at-home' model of home educating saw themselves as offering a greater breadth of educational opportunity to their children than that they would have access to at school. Mothers pointed to their flexibility in home educating, that they could change the amount of time spent on a topic according to interest or need and that they had the ability to follow tangential opportunities that might be of benefit. Although these families made greater use of outings and experiential, 'in-the-field' learning than usually takes place in conventional schools it could be argued that their models of home education bore close resemblance to the kinds of educational experiences presented by primary and lower secondary school education in England and Wales, where there remains some flexibility to adapt day-to-day learning to interests and even to the weather.

The defining features of Social home educators' pedagogical models were therefore its child-centred but parent-led nature, the tendency to formalised but flexible academic learning and the siting of education within a strong moralising/socialising context.

Last Resort home educators' key ideological aim was that of providing the education needed by their individual child through a process of protection, repair and restoration. This is an aim that has not been documented in home education literature, although Rogers' (2007) study of the relationships between parents' of SEN children and the school system refers to the use of home education for such a purpose. These parents perceived their children as having been damaged by their experiences in school and their primary aim in home educating was to help their children to heal and to achieve their potential both academically and socially, something which they felt had been thwarted while their children attended school:

> when I took her out I really thought I was going to lose her she was so depressed and so unhappy, I really thought then I was gonna to lose her and, ... I remember thinking that the most important thing – I'd rather she was stacking shelves in Tescos and happy than going through what she had to go through at school because she didn't fit in. *(Anna, Interview)*

The above aims meant that Last Resort home educators tended to place an even greater emphasis than other home educators on the importance of life skills and preparing their children socially for adulthood, picking up on notions of childhood as vulnerable and incomplete (Kehily, Pattman 2006). These mothers argued that the socialising functions of school, as described by Brint (2006) and Monk (2003) had failed for their children and this therefore justified their emphasis on socialisation as part of the home education process.

The pedagogical methods of Last Resort home educators varied more than within the Natural and Social types and this was a consequence of the aim to provide the education needed by their individual children. All the Last Resort families I encountered described a process of trial and error that had led them to their current pedagogical model.

This process of trial and error had tended to coincide with what parents described as a period of recovery from their children's experiences that had led to their withdrawal from school. Following this period Last Resort home educators tended to sit somewhere between the Social and Natural home educators in the way they went about home education. As described earlier, most families described themselves as having started out by trying to recreate school at home with timetables, school hours, strict adherence to the National Curriculum and a focus on discrete subjects. None had adhered to this model long term, instead adapting it to meet their individual child's needs. Hilary, for example, had chosen to return to foundational pre-school concepts with Beth. All had decided that strict adherence to school hours was unnecessary, and most had moved some way towards less formal, more child-led methods of learning.

Daniel's reaction to Lydia's attempts to model school-at-home were described earlier; for others the movement away from a totally adult-led formal model of education was more gradual and less total:

> The first term he had actually no say at all – I was following his school's work because I still had access to the school's interactive learning area, even though he wasn't going to school

> so I was following what he would have been doing in school, the second term ... we did slavery. The third term I said “what would you like to do?” and he said “pirates”, and I thought well that's not really a national curriculum subject but we went into it and there was so much to learn, it was an enormous subject.
>
> *(Emma, Interview)*

Mothers therefore adjusted their mode of home education to fit the individual child's needs and interests echoing the pedagogical models of Montessori with her emphasis on following children's learning cues (Montessori Jr 1992). In fact it was Last Resort home educators who focussed most closely on fitting their children's education to their individual personalities, development, abilities and aptitudes. This is something not previously noted by home education researchers due to the lack of focus on Last-Resort type home educators. Because these parents were not home educating for any ideological reasons related to their notions of school or state, they were to some extent free to adopt methods of education that they felt best suited their children rather than feeling bound by a particular pedagogical approach suggested by popular home education literature.

‘Last-resort’ home educators perhaps showed the greatest creativity and individualisation of home education as home education gave these parents freedom to imagine the education that they felt that their children needed. This suggests that it was last resort home educators who engaged to the greatest extent in Van Galen's (1991) notion of 'political pedagogy', standing back from the institutional structures of schooling and engaging critically with the notion of

education. Over time they had adapted conventional school-based models of education extensively to fit their individual children's needs, abilities and learning styles. These families had also attempted to construct education in such as way as to eliminate the trauma their children had previously experienced at school.

For parents of children with SEN (especially those who had been unable to obtain a statement for their children while in school), home education provided a freedom to focus on the skills that they felt their children needed at the rate at which their children were able to access them, rather than needing to stay in step with a prescribed rate and level of progression. This notion of 'age-class', as raised by James and Prout (James, Prout 1997) can often be restrictive as it imposes ideas of 'normal' progress upon children and may therefore create stigma for those who do not conform. Home education, in breaking the involuntary learning progression associated with 'age-class' (James, Prout 1997), freed mothers and children to some extent from pressure to conform to 'normal' models of education. Jenny was able to concentrate on her daughter's health needs and tackle her education as and when her daughter was able. For Hilary this flexibility meant that she could take Beth back to the developmental and educational stages that she had missed in earlier life:

> Hilary: We started with shape sorting and what normally you'd think of as preschool stuff, 'cos she'd missed out on a lot of that because of the sort of moving around and foster famiies and one thing and another. So you didn't do very much pre-school stuff at all did you?

Beth: No

Hilary: So we had to go right back to the beginning and start again

Beth: Yeah

For Lydia's son Daniel, whom she described as having Asperger's traits, the movement away from a prescriptive curriculum had allowed him to pursue his love and talent for mathematics and the physical sciences to a high academic level, whilst still struggling at a lower level with other academic skills such as creative writing:

RM: So home ed allows you to-

Lydia: -be uneven, yeah. I mean he can do his A-level maths and we can hope to goodness that we're struggling along nicely along the reading comprehension stuff, and the writing. The long piece writing, planning and all that, that's all he needs to do for the iGCSE

Parents were therefore rejecting the dominant models of 'normal' development (Prout, James 1997, Prout 2005) that form the basis of school-based educational expectations.

With their emphasis on life skills, Last Resort home educators had, with their shift away from a formal school-based model, also expanded their definition of education to encompass a greater proportion of day-to-day life than even Natural home educators. Last Resort participants spent extensive time telling

me about their children's participation in what would traditionally be considered 'extra-curricular' activities, either as individuals or as part of organised group activities such as Girls' Brigade. With most of their children having struggled socially at school, and many having been the victims of extensive bullying, parents saw this aspect of their children's education as extremely important and were keen to recount to me their children's social achievements such as independent bus travel, participating in holiday activities and going away on group camps. These descriptions can be interpreted on two levels. On one level it was a further example of the integration of education into the broader process of socialisation by home educators. On another levels these descriptions served as mothers' justifications of their actions in home educating against the possible criticism that they were socially isolating their children by home educating (Lois 2009). This was a criticism that many Last Resort mothers had faced from educational professionals upon withdrawing their children from school and one about which they were particularly bitter as they described to me their children's negative social experiences in school. Mothers were therefore pre-empting any possible criticism from myself, as well as possibly attempting to broadcast their justifications to a wider audience through my research.

Last Resort families were therefore creative in constructing the model of education that they felt would best fit their individual child, within a broad framework of social and academic aims for education and preparation for adult life, but with a concern to justify and explain their actions.

All types of home educator had rejected, to a greater or lesser extent, what they perceived as conventional models of education. One notable exception,

however, to the rejection of formal school-based education by home educating parents of all types was the tendency for home educated children to be re-integrated into mainstream education post-16.

Almost all the participants in my study expected their children to undertake some form of further or higher education, the ones who did not make such expectations clear tended to be parents of very young children or had only recently removed their children from school. This was as much true of Natural home educators as of Social and Last Resort families.

It was towards this end that many parents and children chose to take formal qualifications such as GCSEs, iGCSEs and A-levels[37][38]. The possession of Level 3 qualifications (in English and Maths in particular) was perceived to make getting a place at college easier.

This tendency to re-integrate into mainstream education and to focus home education towards that end (to a greater or lesser extent) suggests that parents may have been re-imagining and re-inventing education to a lesser extent than they often envisioned. Thomas' (1998) observation that home educators found it hard to break free of internalised models and assumptions about education may also be true here. However, further education tends to afford much more flexibility in subject choice and mode of study than school-based pre-16 education. It could therefore be argued that home educating families were

37 GCSE/iGCSE: academic qualification usually taken at age 16 with 5 GCSEs (or equivalent) usually seen as the minimum requirement for progression to further academic education. A-Levels: (GCE Advanced-Levels) academic qualifications usually requiring 2 years' study following the completion of GCSEs. A-levels are the most commonly taken qualifications to gain access to university degree courses in England and Wales.

38 I did not collect data as to the success or otherwise of my respondents children in examinations (in any case most were preparing for examinations rather than having taken them). Data such as that produced by Rothermel (Rothermel 2002) suggests that home educated children are not at any disadvantage in terms of academic achievement, but without a representative sample such judgements are unreliable.

taking advantage of this flexibility to gain the education that they sought for their individual child. This would suggest that what they valued most in home education was the flexibility it afforded to individualise education above any particular ideological objections to formal education.

Conclusion

As we have seen, home educators from all three types had developed broad aims and definitions of education. These aims and definitions, along with their attitudes towards state and school had a direct influence upon the ways in which they went about home educating their children.

As I have identified, home educators integrated education into an expanded construction of primary, home-based socialisation. The ways in which home educators defined education and the aims of that education went far beyond the constructions associated with school-based education and encompassed the development of social and life skills in preparation for adult life as well as the acquisition of academic knowledge and qualifications. This construction of education as a facet of primary socialisation, rejects dominant models of schools as sites of valuable secondary socialisation, with mothers believing that the extended socialisation they provided within the home was more effective in transmitting both the moral and social values that they wished their children to hold, and the life-skills that they felt were necessary for their children succeed as adults in contemporary society.

This expansion of the notion of education and its coalescence with the process of primary socialisation applied to all three types of home educator, although

there were differences in their ideological aims. Parents' ideological aims in home educating were directly linked to their attitudes towards state and schooling and notions of responsibility discussed in the previous chapter and these consequently influenced their pedagogical models and practices. Natural home educators, with their antipathy to notions of conformity and coercion, tended to adopt a child-centred, child-led approach, often with aspirations to autonomous education which remained either partially or totally unfulfilled. Social home educators tended to adopt a more formal model of home education in an echo of their notions of parental responsibility. Last Resort home educators tended to focus their modelling of home education to fit the specific needs of their individual children, echoing the individual need that had led them to home educate.

Most home educators, especially Natural home educators, saw themselves as re-imagining education in their rejection of school-based education and their broadening of the definition of education to encompass life-skills and their children's wider moral and social development. However, their pedagogical ideals, models and methods were often dissonant. This was particularly the case with the more idealistic pedagogical models of education subscribed to by Natural home educators, echoing the difficulties that other educators have found in implementing a critical pedagogical approach (Allman 2001, Giroux 1983), even with a fuller theoretical awareness and consideration than the unconscious, half-formed use of pedagogical concepts by many of my respondents. So for Natural home educators, the frequently espoused ideal of autonomous home education was translated into a reality which was affected by mothers concerns that their children should achieve a basic level of literacy and

numeracy early in life and also the use of 'nagging' as a method of achieving mother-imposed educational goals.

All the home educators I encountered made extensive use of pedagogical methods that are found within conventional school-based education, and despite intentions and attempts to create an education that was broader than that offered by schools, home educators found it difficult, if not impossible, to distance themselves from traditional educational priorities, models and methods.

I would therefore argue that, rather than being the re-imagining of education that home educators set out to create, home education is actually a re-working of traditional school-based education which has been incorporated into the home-based socialisation of children and therefore into the day-to-day processes of family life. The tendency of home educators to re-integrate their children into the formal education system post-16 also displays a certain level of pragmatism about the necessity of engaging with the formal education system in order to achieve long term educational and career aims.

In their attempts to re-imagine education and their amalgamation of education with the primary socialisation process, mothers were expanding their roles into areas normally deemed the preserve of 'professional' pedagogues. The following chapter examines the experiences of mothers as they undertook the role of mother-pedagogue.

7 Labour and Love

Introduction

In their attempts to re-imagine education mothers were expanding their pedagogical role and thereby increasing the total reach of the motherhood role. Having investigated home educators' attitudes to state and school, their constructions of motherhood and childhood and they ways in which these translated into their models and methods of home education, I now turn to the experiences of mothers in home education. This chapter is therefore an examination of how mothers experienced the 'living out' of their constructions of motherhood, childhood and education.

Mothers' experiences of home education are an almost totally neglected area of home education research. Whilst Stevens (2001) gives the centrality of mothers' roles some consideration and considers the ways in which they construct and justify their actions in home educating, he pays little attention to their actual experiences of the process of home educating. Lois' (2009, 2006) US research, focussing upon the strains that mothers experience in home educating, therefore appears to be the only existing examination of mothers' lived experiences of home education. My findings around home educating mothers' experiences therefore address a key gap in current understanding. Given the dearth of existing literature, my findings explored in this chapter, are grounded in the broader literature around motherhood and maternal involvement in education that has also formed the backdrop to previous chapters. Miller's (2005) study of the experiences of new mothers is particularly

useful as it charts women's experiences of both the enjoyment and difficulties of motherhood, and Bobel (2001) and Wall's (2001) studies of breastfeeding mothers within La Leche League International also highlight mothers' experiences of motherhood bounded by expectations of intensive mothering.

Home educating mothers found a range of different benefits in home education including a greater enjoyment of their motherhood role and the mother-child relationship, intellectual stimulation in home education, increased power and social gains. Home education therefore became a source of fulfilment for mothers as well as an idealised educational experience for their children.

At the same time, however, as mothers found fulfilment in home educating their children, they also found that it demanded their intense labour. Mothers were expected to take on multiple educational roles in addition to the caring and domestic labour roles associated with dominant constructions of motherhood. The intense and demanding nature of home education meant that mothers had to make significant sacrifices in order to home educate. These demands placed significant strain upon mothers in a variety of ways. This chapter therefore explores both the fulfilment and the labour of home education for mothers, and finishes by considering the ways in which they sought to balance these in order to make home education a viable ongoing choice.

Expansion of the motherhood role

The mothers in my study had expanded the role of motherhood through home education. This expansion, unexamined by previous research, encompassed their pedagogical role, their power and their status as mothers. The expansion

of the mothering role reinforced their construction of motherhood as vital and indispensable thereby serving to increase mothers' feeling of fulfilment in home education.

Home educators constructed the conventional pedagogical role of mothers as extremely limited. Several expressed that their teaching of children would 'normally' be limited to teaching children to walk, talk and gain the basics of social interaction in preparation for starting school, at which point teachers and other professionals take over. They also pointed to the considerable surveillance of their role by authorities and professionals, as considered by David (1999), New and David (1985) and Miller (2005). Mothers felt that if they could guide children through the vital stages and complexities of primary socialisation and physical development without specialist training then they were also capable of ensuring that children received a suitable and effective education. This conflict between mothers' feelings about the low social status of motherhood and the importance of the primary socialisation they provided as a foundation for their children's future learning reflects the broader literature on motherhood which highlights the contradiction of motherhood being seen simultaneously as crucial and unimportant (Miller 2005, Gatrell 2008, Benn 1998).

In constructing education as an extension of the socialisation process and bringing it into the private sphere mothers had expanded their pedagogical role in two ways. Firstly they had added to the 'content' of their role, as they were now facilitators of academic learning alongside the social and emotional learning that is part of the dominant construction of motherhood and had therefore taken on roles that were usually constructed as the preserve of the

professional or expert (Reay 1998, Landeros 2011). Secondly, mothers had expanded the length of their pedagogical role: close involvement in their children's learning was maintained beyond the beginning of 'school age', and they remained crucial to their children's education (whatever form that took) for as long as their children remained home educated. This reflects Stambach and David's (Stambach, David 2005) assertion that mothers' close involvement in education is increasingly becoming expected as part of the ideology of intensive mothering. This expansion of pedagogical role is also available to (and frequently taken up by) mothers of schooled children. Bodies of evidence present parental involvement in school-based education as a key determinant of achievement and research by Reay (1998, 1996), Allatt (1993), and more recently Landeros (2011) suggests that mothers of schooled children put substantial time and effort into involving themselves in and facilitating their children's education both inside and outside the classroom. As key facilitators and providers of their children's education, home educating mothers undoubtedly had greater involvement in their children's learning once they reached school age than mothers of schooled children and Reay (1998) has also noted that some mothers are 'shut out' of their children's school-based education with the relationship between mother and teacher being a key factor. The distinction between home educating mothers and schooling mothers was therefore one of the degree of involvement rather than the clear cut distinction between involvement and non-involvement that my respondents tended to present.

Another area of home educators' expanded pedagogical role was the provision of role-models for their children. This returns to home educators' doubts about

the moral and social modelling provided by school-based education and the influence of forces outside the family upon their children. In home educating and thereby controlling their children's exposure to outside influences, mothers were taking on the kind of role envisaged of teachers within the Steiner model of education. This constructs the most important feature of education (up to the age of 14) as the provision of a strong, consistent and enduring role model for children in the form of a single teacher rather than the transient relationships of yearly changes in teacher more commonly found in mainstream schools (Carnie 2003, Steiner 1982, Harwood 1979). Having deemed schools as morally dangerous, either through their structures or interactions, mothers had therefore taken on the primary responsibility for providing a strong role-model to their children, and were effectively acting to raise their status and importance in their children's lives. Expanding their pedagogical role was perceived as a positive change by my respondents as it elevated their self-perceived status as mothers, answering the perceived pressure upon women to do more than 'just' mothering, something also found by Stevens (2001).

The expansion of mothers' pedagogical role in the lengthened provision of a strong focal role model also served to expand mothers' already considerable power over their children.

> A lot of child rearing consists of calming children down, controlling and managing them, getting them to submit and accept the unacceptable. ... [these processes] are carried out by mothers who have enormous power over their children, even though they are otherwise not very powerful. (New, David 1985 , p.22)

By withdrawing their children from (or not submitting them to) school-based education mothers had gained greater power over their children as they were able to define for longer their children's activities and contacts (Apple 2000, Lubienski 2000). Although Natural home educators would argue the opposite, in withdrawing their children from school all the mothers in my study had gained extensive, if not total, control over their children's peer group and therefore their choice of friends, echoing the analysis of Apple (2000) and Lubienski (2000). Home educators had total oversight of where their children went and who they met, especially in the pre-teen years. Some parents were very explicit about this whilst others were less so, or denied that this control existed.

> unfortunately cos of the breakdown of families, especially in what is quite a poor-ish area, you get a lot more moral ambiguity. That Mary and Ollie would have been exposed [at school] to all kind of things I didn't want them to be exposed to.
>
> *(Sophie, Interview)*

All the home educators I encountered ensured, or tried to ensure, that their children had a range of opportunities to interact with other young people, countering a common concern that home educated children lack opportunities to make friendships (Dowty 2000). Echoing, but exceeding, Landeros' (2011) account of mothers who sought total control over their children's school experiences by their almost daily presence in school, home-educating mothers had considerably more power over the nature of these interactions than mothers of schooled children as they were either present during activities (such as those of home education groups) or had been instrumental in bringing about

meetings and activities. 'Summerfest' was a good example of this: whilst children at 'Summerfest' were given a great deal of freedom during the camp to interact as and how they wanted with other children and adults, they had been brought there by their parents with the expectation that they would be surrounded with like-minded families.

In this way, home educators were remarkably similar to some parents of schooled children: Ball (2003), Ball et al (1997), Allatt (1996) and Gorard (Gorard 1997) have argued that the power of selection of social milieu is the preserve of middle class parents who make careful selection of state schools or choose to pay for private education in order to maintain control over their children's peers .

Fulfilment through home education

The expansion of the motherhood role through home education influenced mothers' sense of fulfilment. The all-encompassing, unbounded nature of home education discussed in the previous chapter meant that it affected the entirety of mothers' lives and roles, something also found by Lois (2009, 2006). As mothers became engrossed in home educating their perceptions of motherhood often changed and all but two of my female respondents stated that home education brought them fulfilment in their roles as mothers.

Many participants stated that they had experienced a greater enjoyment of motherhood since starting to home educate their children. All the mothers I spoke to saw home educating as a challenging but positive addition to their role. Several mothers described parenting very young children as monotonous, a

common experience of motherhood (Miller 2005, Gatrell 2008, Benn 1998), and the challenge of home education gave them a new perception of parenting as a whole:

> I think the worst phase of a woman's life is when she has 2 little ones – I'm talking age 2 and a half and six months - I think it is a hell of a lot of work and no intellectual stimulation whatsoever or satisfaction, and that little child the only thing she can do to reward you maybe is to smile at you. There's just, there's just nothing to it Ruth – it's just mindless work day and night - what are you supposed to do with them apart from push them in their buggies and stay in the shops or in the park or wherever? It impacts everything you do and are and it's the whole adjustment from being you, and you and your husband, and you and your work situation, to accommodating them into your life, 24/7, remember, I mean I don't mind 8 hours a day, but 24/7. So I think that's the worst time of a woman's life and I'm chatting to lots of people in the park and they say oh I could never homeschool and I felt exactly the same when my children were that age because there was nothing in it for me. *(Selina, Interview)*

For Sophie, who had not enjoyed experienced the monotony of caring for young children, home education had had the dramatic effect of creating enjoyment in motherhood for the first time:

> I would like to continue, I would like to educate them right through, so actually even if there was an excellent Christian school, from a relationship point of view it has been a great blessing to me, ... And also, because it's, it sounds very selfish, but I'd be really concerned if I had to give it up that I'd go back to being totally low and depressed, which is looking back, before doing it, was probably where I was for years – and an ineffective mother – so it's been really good for me.

Sophie described how she had hated being a mother before she started home educating her two children; so that, when home education became a practical necessity for her family, her husband had been deeply concerned about its likely effect on them all. Sophie's honesty about difficulties and depression after the event is a feature of mothers' constructions of narratives to be publicly acceptable, with ability to reveal problems only once they had been overcome (Miller 2005), as well as acting as a justification of home education as a means of fulfilling expectations of 'good mothering' (Lois 2009).

Several mothers said they felt that children started school just at the point where they were 'getting interesting'. Following Selina's comment that there needed to be some reward in mothering, particularly in order to consider home education, these mothers felt that home education gave them a chance to enjoy their children in a way that was not possible when they were younger. Home education was therefore a relational experience between mother and child which built upon the construction of motherhood as a relational role which centred a mother's life focus around her children (Wall 2001, Lois 2010). At a

gathering of 'Homeschooling Moms', mothers talked about their pleasure in having their children at home and their feelings of being fulfilled in their role. This was echoed by other mothers:

> it is daunting, but it's very exciting, it's very very rewarding, very very satisfying and most definitely, in my experience, the positives most definitely outweigh the difficulties that you have in it ... And I love having my children around. I know most parents wouldn't say that but I enjoy it, my children love me and I love them very much as well. *(Janet, Interview)*

Several of the mothers interviewed, when talking about their improved relationship with their children resulting from home education, talked about 'getting the best' of their children, a notion also raised by Lois' (2009) research participants. Exploring this further they compared 'getting the best' of their child with just getting the 'edges around school'. Mothers felt that when children were at school (taking up a large proportion of their waking hours) they only saw their children at the ends of the day, usually when the children were tired and less able to interact in a meaningful way. The available time was also cut into by the routine of school and getting to and from school; these impinged on the home, created stressful situations and took up a sizeable part of the day.

> the household is generally calmer because the kids don't come home from school stressed ... they [used to] come home and they bounce of the walls, they bounce off me, they bounce of each other and it was like world war three when they were at school. They'd come home and they'd start and it would be like

> non-stop screaming all round, “will you stop doing that”, “don't be horrible to him/her”, “say you're sorry”, “go to your room if you can't be nice” – it seemed to be like constant Hitler from me and it's just not right. *(Lydia, Interview)*

By avoiding the constrictions of the school day mothers were gaining increased time and contact with their children in a way which both they and their children could use to their best advantage, and, Lois (2009) argues, boosting mothers' sense of being 'good' mothers. In being able to spend the most alert hours of the day with their children the mothers felt that mothering was a more fulfilling and pleasant role.

For those who had given up jobs and careers to become 'stay at home mothers' there was often a sense of having successfully shed the guilt of abandonment and 'bad' parenting often placed upon working mothers (Wall 2001, Benn 1998, Charles, Kerr 1999, Vincent, Ball 2006).

> I really enjoyed it and I liked the benefit it brings to your life, I feel, I also realise that my primary love language is quality time and I never feel guilty about leaving them to go off to work like I did when Ruth and Lizl were babies. And, for me it has simplified my life, emotionally as well *(Selina, Interview)*

In Selina's statement there is also a subtle assertion that these women were managing to 'have their cake and eat it', in that they were undertaking stimulating and challenging work whilst dedicating themselves to raising their children, something also found by Lois (2009).

Stevens (2001) found that mothers enjoyed the intellectual stimulation that they felt home education provided. Similarly, almost all the mothers I encountered experienced pleasure in learning, and home education was described as an adventure that brought enjoyment to both parent and child. Mothers drew pleasure from two aspects; firstly their child's learning and the knowledge that they had assisted in that learning process; and secondly the fact that they themselves learnt new knowledge and skills alongside their children.

Mothers saw and could appreciate the progress of their children's learning. Mothers of children in school can feel divorced from the children's experiences in the classroom and feel discouraged from seeking detail about what goes on there, and what specific learning take place (Reay 1998, Rogers 2007) and may go to extraordinary lengths in order to gain that insight (Landeros 2011). Participants in my study had often had similar experiences and felt ill-informed about their children's progress while they were in school:

> it's parental involvement when they want it for what they want to achieve, and one of the classic ways that institutions prevent engagement or challenge is withholding information, so we never really got a detailed run down, *(Alan, Interview)*

In having their children at home with them rather than at school, mothers were able to witness more directly their children's discovery of new knowledge and understanding and their enjoyment in mastering new skills. As found by Stevens (2001), home educating families placed great importance on education and the centrality of mothers' involvement in their children's learning therefore meant that their children's educational achievements, at any level, were prized.

> it's lovely to see him when he gets it and produces some work, and just knowing that he's happy and he's not going to that school every day, and I'm enjoying it because I'm learning loads! *(Emma, Interview)*

Home education meant that as well as having an active part in day-to-day learning, mothers had an intimate knowledge of their children's development which helped to reinforce their construction of themselves as experts on their children (Stevens 2001, Lois 2009). As Emma's statement also shows, perceptions of their children's happiness had a direct impact upon mothers' happiness.

Mothers' felt that their expertise on their children was evidenced in their educational progress[39] and achievements. Many mothers also expressed a sense of accomplishment in the knowledge that they were directly responsible for their children's learning. This sense of accomplishment strongly increased their fulfilment as mothers.

> it's so enjoyable, but sometimes it's a battle, I'm not saying it's all easy, but sometimes he'll say thank you for home edding me and sometimes you know when you hear him talking quite articulately about something that I've taught him – that was me! It's kind of satisfying. I think it's been worth it, yes. *(Emma, Interview)*

39 Progress was not normally measured in any formal way, but instead by mother's informal comparisons with their children's previous accomplishments.

As well as gaining satisfaction from their children's learning, home education provided mothers with mental stimulation of their own. In contrast to the monotony of caring for younger children described earlier, deciding upon curricula and educational materials and addressing the question of how to home educate their individual children presented mothers with an intellectual challenge and a level of interest that they had not experienced previously. This was a sentiment expressed particularly by Social home educators, in direct contrast to Van Galen's (1988) assessment of home educators who followed formal practices as lacking interest in and engagement with the actual process of home educating.

As well as teaching and facilitating their children's learning, mothers also found that they were learning alongside their children, covering either unfamiliar material or regaining knowledge and skills from the distant past. For most parents this meant that they were learning in partnership with their children:

> Marion has been doing long multiplication and long division, and cancellation of fractions and multiplication and division of fractions and all this kind of stuff, which OK, I'm not totally old, but it was a good few years ago that I was doing it, ... and I have learnt an awful lot. But it's just, that's the exciting part you know, we're doing a project on birds and we're learning together and we get so excited about it, it sounds, some people might think it was really sad, but we get really excited about ... these are birds, these are winged creatures, they've all got beaks and everything but they're just made so uniquely, they are all made perfectly for the habitat for the diet for everything and you know

> and just finding out things like that it's a really exciting thing
>
> *(Janet, Interview)*

Mothers felt that they were gaining intellectual stimulation from their children's home education, something also found by Stevens (2001), and there is a sense in these accounts of a real enjoyment and full involvement in their children's educations; mothers were relishing their own learning as much as that of their children.

> The third term I said what 'would you like to do?' and he said 'pirates', and I thought well that's not really a national curriculum subject but we went into it and there was so much to learn, it was an enormous subject. We learnt about famous pirates, we learnt about female pirates, we learnt about ... what they did, we learnt to talk like a pirate, we did Treasure Island, you know we went on pirate walks, it was good, there was Geography in there as well, it was a good project *(Emma, Interview)*

The accounts of Emma and Janet, among others, of the joys of learning alongside their children are a stark contrast to the accounts of the boredom and monotony of motherhood put forward earlier, reinforcing the notion that the expansion of mothers' roles through home education was closely associated with finding fulfilment in that role. In stark contrast to McDowell's (2000) finding that mothers who felt 'forced' into home education resented it and found no pleasure in their children's learning, even Last Resort home educators, such as Emma, where home education had been an act of desperation rather than a

desired outcome, mothers had found satisfaction in their children's learning and the knowledge that they themselves gained from it.

> I wouldn't want her to know that I thought I had no choice that I did it [home education] ..., I don't regret it in any way shape or form, it was interesting for me too. *(Anna, Interview)*

In addition several mothers also talked about home education as having increased their own desire to learn, with some being keen to undertake adult or further education courses in the future.

Bobel (2001) and Wall (2001) in their studies of breastfeeding mothers, describe the use mothers made of shared interest groups to build their own social networks and find friendship. As well as gaining fulfilment through the relationship with their children and the intellectual stimulation of home education, mothers also found significant social gain for themselves through involvement in home education groups. All except four families interviewed were members of some kind of home education support group that met on a regular basis. Of the four families who were not involved in such groups, three received extensive support from other sources. Hannah and Hilary gained support from their churches, whilst Jenny drew hers from local friends and from a network of parents of children with ME. All of these mothers spoke of the benefits of support and how it enabled them to carry on with home education, echoing Miller's (2005) findings about the importance of peer support for new mothers in giving them confidence in their new role.

Jeanette described the Seaville group as providing primarily social and emotional support for mothers; on one of my visits mothers were discussing a

forthcoming 'curry night', an informal event held about once a month for the parents rather than the children. Lydia described the weekly classes held by the Seaville group as “as much about the Mums' coffee as anything else” as they provided an opportunity for support and relaxation while children were occupied. This again is reminiscent of Miller's (2005) findings about new mothers turning away from professionals to seek help and support from their peers and other experienced mothers.

Many mothers said that they attended home education groups primarily for their own benefit even though they were ostensibly set up for the children. For the mothers, the support groups (of whatever kind) reduced the risk of social isolation and exclusion and served in a similar way to 'the school gate' as a means of meeting other parents and forming friendships. Sophie, who was not a member of a group, was very keen to find one as she felt she needed the support and friendship of other home educating parents. Every time I met her she spoke of her wish to find other parents to stave off a sense of isolation.

The presence of support from others who had rejected the dominant institution of schooling therefore appeared to be a key component in finding fulfilment in home education. Mothers saw support groups as offering both moral and social support. Often close friendships were formed which went beyond the shared concern with home education. Several mothers spoke of having gained new friendships through the groups and of home education as having given them a better 'social life', something that Wall (2001) also found in her study of La Leche League International members. This was something that I heard often when talking to mothers at Summerfest, but also encountered elsewhere:

> for me it was meeting other parents, and one unexpected benefit of home education is I've mad so many friends, I've made so many good friends in the last year, I think more than in the whole six years I've been living down here, cos I moved from Scotland, and when I came down here I found it hard to make friends ... in a new town. So yeah I had my friends at work but apart from that, I knew people but that's been an unexpected side benefit, which has been very very nice, I have a good social life based on that which is fantastic. *(Emma, Interview)*

The social benefits that mothers perceived in home education reflect the experience of many women of motherhood as socially isolating with its loss of social status and location within the private sphere (Miller 2005, Gatrell 2008, Benn 1998). Home education, in raising mothers' sense of power and fulfilment through the expansion of their pedagogical role and in providing social opportunities, could therefore make motherhood a much more fulfilling experience than it might otherwise have been.

Intense labour of home education

While home education brought fulfilment for mothers, it also involved intense, around-the-clock labour. Mothers had to fulfil multiple roles and their associated workloads, the burden of which also led to their having to make a range of practical and emotional sacrifices for the sake of the project of home education. This means that while the mothers in my study often presented home education as enjoyable, there were also aspects of it that they struggled with. This section

explores those struggles, something which has been little explored in home education research. One notable exception to this is Lois' (2006, 2010) work on the temporal and emotional labour of home educating mothers in the US.

The broadened definitions of education held by home educators and the increased time they spent with their children held implications for home educating mothers. Home education became 24/7 by nature. Mothers found that they spent all, or almost all their time with their children, meaning that their activities were centred around their children's needs, something which is usually the experience of mothers of very young children (Miller 2005, New, David 1985, Gatrell 2008, Benn 1998). In fact, the time-bound nature of such intensive mother-child interactions to four or five years pre- school, and the knowledge of it as such, is one of the ways in which mothers cope with its demands (Wall 2001, Lois 2010). Home education required intense and unceasing labour from mothers for several additional years even where an autonomous, informal and child-led approach was being followed.

The expansion of 'education' and the home education process to encompass all parts of daily life, from formal learning to leisure activities and outings, also meant that home education could never be 'escaped' from:

> you've got be a mother, and a friend and a teacher, all of these things, all in one, which is quite a demanding role, I think it's really hard on the parents actually, not so hard on the children. Home education requires a lot of dedication I would say – you've got to be totally committed to what you're doing, it's a 24 hour, 7 day a week job. When I'm asleep I'm thinking about

> education - what I'm going to do about this problem, or what resources I can use next year, or whatever, all the time, I don't mind that, I like it, but for some people it would be completely overwhelming. *(Denise, Interview)*

For mothers home education was ever-present, and their accounts of how any activity could be interpreted as educational, and of their ingrained habits of looking for the learning potential in any activity or place illustrates the ways in which home education became dominant in mothers' lives, an effect also noted by Lois (2010) and Stevens (2001).

The total dependence of (particularly younger) children upon adult facilitation and presence, meant that home educating mothers were 'tied' closely to their children, often without relief. Gail described the experience of leaving her daughters with someone for the first time ever when they were aged around seven and eight:

> [our group] had an American lady here with her little girl, she had several girls, and her youngest used to come for me for language and then she'd have my 2 for science – had a year of that and that was wonderful, that was the first time I'd not had to have my own children, I used to wander round the house on a Monday morning kind of [raises hands into air to indicate sense of freedom] - it was lovely. *(Gail, Interview)*

In taking on home education therefore, mothers were entering into a total subsuming of self to their mothering role and to the project of home education

similar to that expected of mothers who choose to breastfeed for extended periods (Bobel 2001, Wall 2001). This immersion reflects again a highly idealised and conservative construction of intensive motherhood where the role of the mother is centred exclusively upon giving to her family's emotional and caring needs (Miller 2005, Gatrell 2008, Hays 1998).

Part of the unremitting nature of home education was the expectation, hinted at by Denise above, that home educating mothers would take on a multiplicity of different roles associated with being mothers, educators and being home-based. In all the two-parent families involved in my study (except for James'), mothers were expected to take full responsibility for the household and domestic tasks as well as the tasks of childcare and home education a burden also assumed by the mothers in Lois' study (2010). Following a pattern established by more general studies of the domestic division of labour (Gatrell 2008, Taylor, Bennett et al. 2010), some mothers justified this with the explanation that they were not undertaking paid work outside the home, however Denise and Tanya who ran their own businesses alongside home educating their children still took this responsibility echoing the fact that mothers maintain responsibility for domestic tasks even where they are engaged in paid work outside the home (Charles, Kerr 1999, Vincent, Ball 2006, Breen, Cooke 2005). This reinforces the idea that home educators were following dominant models of mothering roles and their associated domestic responsibility. Home education therefore added to rather than replacing the conventional labour burden of mothers .

Several mothers spoke of the effort required and the difficulty of combining these roles. At the very least these women all held the roles of mother,

teacher/facilitator of education, housekeeper and home-maker, with all the associated expectations and tasks of these roles. Emma also had to integrate her role as a paid worker outside the home, whilst Tanya and Denise both ran their own small educational businesses.

> I structure the day, I have to have structure to the day cos I'm not only a teacher, I'm a mother, I'm a wife and a housewife. So I have to have structure *(Janet, Interview)*

> it's all day and somehow you've got to do your housework as well and the other jobs of being a mum and then you've got to do your planning, or I did the last 2 years. And then you've got to theoretically play with your children, but that doesn't happen very easily. ... So it's trying to get that balance *(Sophie, Interview)*

For some mothers the expectation of multiple roles was onerous and left them anxious about the need to maintain a certain level of 'service' within the household; to children, domestic tasks and her husband. As both Stevens (2001) and Lois (2010) have found, some of these expectations were self-imposed, with mothers being reluctant either to 'let things slide' or viewing husbands and partners as incompetent, whilst others came from husbands and partners. Such high expectations reflected again an internalisation of the ideology of intensive mothering on top of persisting inequalities in the division of domestic labour. Other mothers, whilst acknowledging that they held these multiple roles and that they made significant demands on their time, had

decided to let some aspects of their role 'slip', prioritising their mothering role over housework tasks:

> there's a lot less time for housework, not that I really care about that, but you know, housework's a kind, “well if I must”. the dust is this thick “oh I suppose I better get rid of it”. *(Lydia, Interview)*

This is a difference from common findings about mothers' prioritisation of their joint childcare and domestic labour roles, as much research over the years suggests that mothers tend to fit childcare around housework rather than vice versa (New, David 1985, Gatrell 2008, Oakley 1976) and suggests that home educating mothers may have made their role even more child-centred than is required by dominant ideals of motherhood, or that they are justifying their focus on the more enjoyable aspects of their role by appealing to an ideal of child-centred mothering.

The role of 'home educator' in itself, was not a simple one. As well as performing the multiple broad roles described above, the mothers in my study were also performing multiple educational roles, that in most schools would be divided between staff to achieve a level of specialisation. While, Tooley (2000) sees the assumption of multiple specialist roles by teachers as impractical, impossible and harmful, the approach taken by the parents in my study bears closer links to Steiner educational philosophy which advocates a single strong adult presence fulfilling multiple roles in children's educational lives (Steiner 1982, Harwood 1979).

Mothers therefore found themselves acting as:

- teachers: explaining material and planning learning activities;
- learning support assistants: providing one-to-one support through learning tasks;
- careers advisors: investigating opportunities for further education, work experience and employment;
- facilitators of their children's interests: investigating and organising activities such as formal courses and clubs;
- examinations officers: finding examination centres that would admit their children, paying exam fees and coordinating coursework;
- curriculum designers: resourcing and researching learning materials, curricula, learning styles;
- and parents of children with SEN also found themselves taking on the role of SENCO.

These multiple roles demanded a wide variety of skills and a number of them called for detailed specialist knowledge. Although five of the mothers I interviewed (and several more I encountered) were qualified teachers and therefore may have had some experience of some of the more specialised roles, many were not. This meant that mothers were learning 'on-the-job', something which, whilst it added to the mental stimulation that home education gave them, also added to the intense labour that they were required to perform.

Lydia describes below the work she was putting into helping her son form a careers plan and gain access to careers advice at the time of our interview.

This snapshot hints at the research and time commitment which must have gone into finding the relevant information, filling in forms and helping her son to formulate ideas about his aspirations:

> He's got an interview next week at one [college] and we've got an application form for another to send off. And then he's off to university to do maths and computing he hopes, and then we went to a graduate careers fair yesterday, we snuck into a graduate careers fair to get some ideas of what he could do.
>
> *(Lydia, Interview)*

In a similar way, Jill described the efforts she had made to find suitable art courses for their daughter and the negotiation she had had to do to gain admission for Lois to adult education classes that were usually not accessible to under-16s.

Such a wide range of educational roles required a great deal of labour from mothers who found themselves often in need of specialised knowledge and expertise, not just in terms of academic knowledge but more importantly of how and where to find resources and information, often on a limited budget. These demands upon home educators have also been noted by Ofsted (2010) Home educating mothers were therefore doing what the parents of schooled children have also been shown to do: making use of whatever forms of capital were available to them in seeking the 'best' possible education for their children (Landeros 2011, Reay 1996, Ball 2003, Bourdieu 1997). All three types of home educator clearly made extensive and exhaustive use of whatever educational, social and financial capital was available to them in order to

enhance their children's education. This was one area in which mothers particularly valued the support and networking that could take place through home educating groups, where resources, experience and contacts could be exchanged.

The intense labour of home education and its associated time commitment meant that alongside their hard and unrelenting work, mothers had to make substantial sacrifices in order to home educate. These sacrifices were financial, social and emotional and, as noted by Lois (2009, 2010) were an integral part of the expectations surrounding 'good' mothering.

Perhaps the most obvious sacrifice made by many mothers was that of career. In order to home educate, many mothers had had to give up their paid work outside the home. For some, like Hilary and Anna, paid work, as well as being a source of finance, had also been a source of status and identity. The importance of paid work as a source of separate identity for mothers is something reflected in the literature on motherhood (Miller 2005, Gatrell 2008, Benn 1998). The sacrifice of paid work had therefore been something which had often been done with reluctance:

> I loved me job, I really didn't want to give up. I cried me eyes out when I left, I really was quite unsure as to whether it was the right thing to do, clung onto the fact that I would probably be able to go back to work in September *(Hilary, Interview)*

As well as the loss of identity and status associated with paid work, a more common and practical complaint complaint was the associated loss of income, reflecting Fortune-Wood's assertions that many home educating families do so

on a limited budget (Fortune-Wood 2005). At least three of the mothers interviewed (Selina, Janet and Gail) who had stayed at home whilst their children were small would have returned to paid employment had their children started school. A further eight mothers had been contributing financially to the family prior to home education, all had substantially modified their paid work arrangements as a consequence of home education, with four giving up paid work altogether. This loss of income sometimes restricted what families could afford to do, or meant that they prioritised home education financially over other activities:

> you are going to be financially starved because, both my husband and I could earn quite a good wage, and we live off his – so we're half a wage coming in really and it's hard. It's very hard, I try to make ends meet, it is very hard and yet we both have talked about this several times when money has been so tight and we've said, he's said, I would rather we were poor than we both worked and had holidays abroad and our children's needs were not met *(Gail, Interview)*

> we could have moved from here to the other side of [town] or whatever and paid an awful lot of money ... but it just didn't seem worth it. So we've stuck with what we were happy with so that we can, we were then able to make the decision with homeschooling well OK if it does cost us a big amount of money that's OK we can cope with that. *(Jenny, Interview)*

The loss of income was frequently commented on by mothers who found that not only had they less income than previously, but also that they faced greater expenditure through home education, something also noted by Ofsted's (2010) report. Home educators found that educational materials and resources that were available to schooled children from school, now had to be paid for directly. Such extra expenses included books, curriculum materials, art materials, on-line subscriptions and membership of home education organisations and activity groups. Examination fees for those families who chose to take GCSE or A-level examinations, could run into many hundreds of pounds per subject. Echoing popular literature on home education (Dowty 2000, Bendell 1987, Hopwood, O'Neill et al. 2007), many parents were resentful of the fact that, although they continued to pay taxes which would have funded their children's education had they been at school, they received no financial assistance from the state in home educating their children.

> It would be nice if you got a bit of money to do it, because you know schools get allocated an amount of money to educate your child and when your child's not there you don't get it. But actually that .... I mean for me I'm a single mum in a council house and I haven't got any money, it would have been nice to have a bit of help to you know, I had to pay for Maths [tuition] and I paid for English when she got to a certain level, because I thought it would be better for her. *(Anna, Interview)*

As well as the material financial sacrifices that mothers (and their families) made in choosing to home educate, mothers also found that the full-time, all-

pervasive nature of home education also meant that they sacrificed their personal space, time, interests and identity. This was an amplification of the sense of loss experienced by new mothers (Miller 2005, Benn 1998). The concept of 'me time' and its loss in home education was something that almost all the mothers in my study, both during interviews and observations referred to, commenting on the way that home educating had severely restricted the time they had by themselves to pursue their own interests. Lois (2010) highlights the loss of 'me time' as a primary source of frustration for home educating mothers and ascribes it as the key cause of 'burn out' for home educators (Lois 2006). In a similar way many of my respondents felt that this was the greatest strain that home educating placed upon them and was the key reason for them occasionally wishing that they had sent their children to school:

> Because you do get one or two days a week when you think any school will do, anywhere – I just want them out. Because you don't, once you take that choice you never have time, *(Sophie, Interview)*

The loss of individual time away from children could have many different practical implications. Lydia had had to give up on her Open University studies for the time being as she found that home education was too time consuming to allow her to continue. Several other mothers commented that they had expected to be doing other things by now; able to focus on careers or pastimes whilst children were at school. Their plans had to be put aside or adjusted to allow for home education, an effect also noted by Stevens (2001).

Emma, a lone mother who was employed part-time, found that her evenings, even after her son was in bed, were taken up with planning the next day's 'lessons'. Even home educators who followed a less structured pattern of home education found that their time was consumed by facilitating education. Patrick and Cathy's 'breadcrumbs' approach to learning described in Chapter 6 must have required significant research on their part, even though this is not specifically mentioned.

Echoing Lois' (Lois 2010) findings, several mothers felt that they had lost a great deal of independence through home education. They expressed frustration that their wishes and pleasures were subsumed to their children's needs and wants and their time absorbed by the demands of home education.

All except one mother (Lindsay) were convinced that overall they were providing a 'good enough' education for their children and that what they were providing was superior to what their children would be, or had been, receiving in school. However, it appeared that, as parents were aspiring to the 'best' for their children in terms of both appropriateness and quality of education, they were subject to their own constant evaluation and doubting of the home education process. This process of self-evaluation bears strong resemblance to the self-surveillance by mothers of their mothering in order to keep it within the boundaries defined by dominant constructions of motherhood (Miller 2005). As well as being self-surveillant of their mothering, home educating mothers also compared their home education against that of their peers as well as against the models of home education put forward through popular home education literature.

> when you said at the beginning that the purpose of this conversation was to find out how and why, I thought well that's the questions I ask my self nearly every day – why am I doing this, and how am I doing this? *(Denise, Interview)*

In addition to negotiating social constructions of 'good' mothering therefore, the parents in my study were also having to negotiate their own and others' constructions of a 'good' education and a 'good' educator. Lois (2006), appears to be the only writer on home education who has identified such pressure upon home educating mothers as, although McDowell (2000) identifies home educating mothers as worrying about the quality of the education they provided, she does not provide any analysis of this with regard to the causes of such worries. The discourse of persecution that was prevalent among home educators[40] served to reinforce both mothers' fears and doubts about their home education, and the self-surveillance process. In rejecting dominant models of education, but at the same time perceiving themselves as under scrutiny by the system that generated those dominant models, the process of self-surveillance as a means of justification of their actions became even more important, and pressurising, to mothers. Even Natural home educators, who were trying to reject pressures to conform to dominant constructions of education, often became concerned about their failure or success in achieving the ideal of autonomous home education. This could only add to the intense labour that mothers required of themselves in home educating.

A fine balance

40 Explored in Chapter 4

The combination of the fulfilment that mothers experienced through home education and its need for intense labour and substantial sacrifice, meant that home educators needed to maintain a balance between its demands and benefits. This balance was often a fine one, and many mothers foresaw the possibility of it becoming more difficult to maintain. The concept of balance between fulfilment and strain is not one that has previously been considered with regard to mothers' roles as home educators. I now explore that balance and the ways in which mothers managed or struggled to maintain it.

In order to feel that their lives were in balance mothers had devised a series of 'coping mechanisms' to allow themselves to re-assert their identity as people in their own right and separate from their children. The key aspect of these mechanisms was their creation for mothers of space apart from their children – both physically and emotionally. Whilst Lois identifies mothers' attempts to gain physical and emotional space from their children, the mothers in my study used very different methods to those noted by Lois (2010). Whilst Lois identifies mothers' attempts to involve fathers in the home education process as their key mechanism for relieving the pressure they felt, only one of my respondents (Sarah) mentioned this as a tactic.

For Anna, paid work had a financial imperative as she was a lone mother. She had for a time given it up to focus on home education, albeit reluctantly, and had returned to paid work at the first available opportunity. For several mothers, however, paid work outside the home was primarily a source of a separate identity and respite from the intensity of home education which then allowed them to return refreshed to their intense mothering role:

> I've been going to work 2 days a week and I'm developing as a person at the minute quite amazingly for myself, and I want to do more things with the children that I wouldn't have even tried to do before, … I'm [a shop] girl, at the moment, was a waitress, yeah, I really enjoy just going into work and having a chat and coming back again *(Sarah, Interview)*

This is something that many mothers outside of home education use paid work for (Gatrell 2008, Benn 1998), however this was more difficult for home educating mothers because of the full time, home-based, nature of home education and paid work was therefore not an option for many. In any case, for Sarah, this tactic did not seem to have been enough to redress the balance of home education. At the time of the interview she remained frustrated with home education. Despite it being her ideal, as part of her choice of an alternative lifestyle, she found it claustrophobic and further tensions were created between herself and Alan as she tried to pass greater responsibility for the day-to-day education to him, echoing the experience of Lois' (2010) respondents as they attempted to increase fathers' involvement in home education. Sarah's situation reflects the fact that mothers engaged in paid work still retain key caring responsibility for their children and so take on a greater burden of work overall than their partners (Breen, Cooke 2005, Hochschild, Machung 1990, Duncombe, Marsden 1999)

Other parents sought to create personal space away from their children as part of their daily routine. Hilary and Beth described the way in which the end of 'school-work' signalled some individual time for both of them:

Hilary: we need time apart, which is why at 3 o'clock she disappears off to her bedroom or I go off to the computer. … It's not something we ever decided is it Beth? But it has sort of happened, I mean we do need time apart definitely, don't we?

Beth: Oh yeah

Mothers who did not have access to support networks who could provide childcare on a regular basis were creative in their attempts to generate time for themselves away from their children and the demands of home educating:

> I have to be selfish and say “no this needs to happen”, one of them is my Bible time in the morning, the other one is my exercise time in the morning. And the other one then is I have time out for myself, it could be 25 minutes like today, it could grow into 2 hours once a week or whatever, but there is a time and I've trained them since they were 4 or 5 years old to give me first 5 minutes and then 10 minutes where I put them in a protected environment like say the lounge and at that stage, when they were little, I took all the furniture of the lounge so that it could be completely safe and put on this, I use my TV as a babysitter, because they don't watch TV enough, hardly ever, so that's just wonderful. *(Selina, Interview)*

Both Selina and Lydia described their use of the television as a means of occupying their children, freeing them up to have personal relaxation time or to

complete necessary household tasks. This reflects Lois' (2010) observation of the downgrading of 'me time' by mothers to include any time away from their children The use of the television as a 'babysitter' is a contradiction of dominant constructions of 'good mothering' (Miller 2005, Benn 1998, Palmer 2006) and both Lydia and Selina were keen to emphasise the 'educational' value of the viewing and, as can be seen, Selina was also descriptive of the ways in which she made sure her (young) children were safe whilst left unattended.

Other home educators arranged to 'swap' children for set periods each week, giving themselves precious time to relax or complete other tasks. When I visited Denise to interview her, her eldest child was at Jeanette's house working on Chemistry A-level work with Jeanette's daughter Rachel. As well as giving mothers respite from their children, such arrangements also allowed them to make use of others' expertise in their children's education.

As noted above, many parents were very honest about the personal restrictions that home educating placed on them. Whilst some parents actively sought personal space, time and identities away from their children and the demands of home education, others constructed such desires differently. Some mothers, especially some of the Social home educators that were also Evangelical Christians I spoke to, constructed 'me-time' as a 'selfish' desire, arguing that they should be devoted to their children. These parents, whilst acknowledging and naming the loss of personal time as a significant sacrifice, simultaneously sought to justify that sacrifice as right and unquestionable, echoing both Christian home education literature which emphasises the responsibility of parents over their rights (Richards 2007), but also the discourses of 'natural' movements such as La Leche League which emphasises the mother's centrality

to the nurturing of her child (Bobel 2001, Wall 2001). Sophie's statement, quoted earlier, expressed her sense of frustration at her inability to escape from the constant presence of her children

> Because you do get one or two days a week when you think any school will do, anywhere – I just want them out. Because you don't, once you take that choice you never have time, ...

but then went on immediately to construct the source of that frustration as a moral learning experience for herself:

> ... which is really good for you, because I think one can be, in our kind of climate we can be totally selfish and I know I was and we want our time and I don't think God created us to be totally isolated and just indulge ourselves so it's actually far healthier to not have the time, but I do cry out for it. And you'd be willing to send them anywhere just for a day or two.

At a gathering of Christian home educators at Tanya's home there was a lengthy discussion between a small group of four or five mothers (including Sophie and Janet) which progressed through the following stages: *i)* describing the intense labour that home education demanded of them *ii)* the resulting loss of me-time, to *iii)* mourning that loss and expressing a level of desperation for such time away from their children to pursue their own interests, to *iv)* a general agreement that wishing for such space was selfish and that the loss of such time was God's means of training them to be less selfish and more devoted to their families.

There was therefore a sense that, in constructing their wish for time and an identity separate from their mothering role as selfish and unGodly, these women were justifying to themselves (and to myself as an observer) their subsuming of self to the project of home education. In doing so they were also able to maintain and build their constructions of themselves as fulfilling the role of ideal motherhood (Miller 2005, Benn 1998). Their construction of their mothering role as their primary, crucial role, with sole responsibility for their children was therefore used to justify their children's total consumption of their time with little or no respite, bearing strong similarities to the justifications of Lois' (2009) US respondents.

In terms of coping with their fears regarding the quality of home education, four mothers (all Social home educators) assuaged some of their fears by regularly assessing their children's academic progress using formalised (and in one case independently marked) tests. Many parents, especially Last- Resort home educators, compared where their children were now (emotionally, socially and academically) to where they had been prior to home education or where they might be had they remained in school. Anna describes this rationalisation in a particularly vivid way:

> I think when I was having a bad day and I was thinking about Sam's education I just kept going back to that picture of I'd rather she was happy and stacking shelves at Tescos than she was dead. And that always grounded me and made me think "OK you don't want to do any maths today we won't do any maths today", let's cook, let's make a cake, let's go and go to the library and find out about something, let's just do nothing.

The majority of parents sought reassurance through their home educating peers in a similar way to that described by Miller's (2005) study of new mothers and Wall's (2001) study of breastfeeding mothers. Jeanette, however, was dubious about the extent to which such 'support' was actually helpful for those with the greatest doubts, implying that home education groups could end up being competitive, and that there was a risk of destroying less confident mothers' confidence in their abilities, rather than boosting it.

Parents' fears and doubts appeared to decrease over time, with the parents who had been home educating for the longest periods of time expressing fewer fears and greater confidence as well as becoming more pragmatic about their fears and normalising them as a common aspect of parenthood.

> I have no doubts with Rachel, I mean I have short term doubts all the time, but I know we've provided her with a much better education than she would ever have got at school because she couldn't utilise what was available and I wouldn't send her back to school *(Jeanette, Interview)*

Whilst all the mothers I spoke to had created some kind of coping mechanisms for themselves to deal with the day-to-day intense labour of home education, the sense of a fine balance extended beyond their view of home education on a day-to-day basis to their expectations of home education as an ongoing process. Home educating was seen as a precarious situation by most that I encountered, the two key exceptions being Jill and Charles, and Jeanette, both of whose children were less than a year from 'school-leaving' age, were

expecting to go on to college and who had therefore nearly completed their process of home education.

It emerged that, for most mothers, their current state of home educating was not set in stone. Instead home education was seen as their current situation, applicable to their lives at that particular moment in time, with an openness to the possibility that they would not be home educating for the entirety of their children's pre-16 educational careers. This is a state suggested by Jackson's (Jackson 2007) Australian research on home educated children who make repeated transitions between home- and school-based education. In direct contrast to Lois' (2006, 2010) respondents, who did not seem to see stopping home education as an option, however strained and exhausted they might be; there was a sense that at the moment home education met the needs of the family; but that it might or might not be able to meet those needs in the future.

> we take it a day at a time, a month at a time, we take it a year at at time, so if you were to ask me would we carry it on into secondary education I would say to you it depends upon what the Lord wants us to do and how we go, you know I don't have a closed mind to it at all, if I was well and able and believed that it was right for us to take our children into secondary home education I would do it, but if there was a need for any reason that we felt that it was right for us to put our children back into school then we would do it, but we would rather go with the first if we were able to do it *(Janet, Interview)*

At the time of my fieldwork all the parents who were currently home educating, except one mother, expressed their wish to continue, at least until their children reached 'school-leaving age'[41]. The mother who did not wish to continue home education, encountered briefly at Summerfest, described herself as 'burnt out' and exclaimed “I wish my girls would say they wanted to go to school”. The fact that exhaustion was a common concern, however, was highlighted by a well-attended seminar at Summerfest entitled 'How to Prevent Home Education Burn-Out' (a seminar which, although I was not explicitly barred from, it was made clear by the organiser that I would not be welcome at).

Despite the wish to continue home education, there were a number of circumstances which mothers could envisage causing them to put their children into school. These included financial constraints, inability to fulfil their children's learning need (particularly at secondary level), ill-health and paternal veto of home-education. Denise described the situation that had led to her son Liam's return to school (although she had continued to home educate her other two children):

> we really just take each year as it comes. Last year it was very difficult because Andy [husband] wasn't very well, ... and things got very difficult at home, with Andy being off and small house as you can see, ... And Liam suffers from ADD ... So he has a very short attention span, needs to be out and about a lot, can't cope with distractions or lack of routine all that kind of thing, so we decided as a family that it was best for us to look around for

41 Although Alan and Sarah had also earmarked a specific private school that they felt would reflect their values, as a possible alternative to continuing home education.

> Liam for some sort of provision for him. Especially with Harriet needing a lot more attention with her GCSEs, and Aaron was getting older, he couldn't just be left, we needed to give him some time as well

Another key reason for ending home education that mothers could envisage was if it ceased to be enjoyable and fulfilling for themselves. Sarah's frustration and her feeling of claustrophobia in home education, suggested that she was not managing to maintain the fine balance between fulfilment and intense labour that was needed to make home education work for mothers. In fact I left my interview with Sarah and Alan unsure whether they would continue to home educate for very long[42].

Something that all mothers in my study held in common were fears and anxieties about the adequacy of their parenting and education of their children. These doubts were a key threat to the project of home education and provided further explanation of why mothers saw their home educating status as more or less precarious.

Conclusion

Literature on mothers' experiences of home education is extremely limited, with no serious scholarship on the situation in England and Wales. My findings, contextualised by the limited literature on home educating mothers' experiences from the US and broader literature on motherhood, therefore highlight a previously unexamined aspect of home education.

42 Unfortunately, despite several attempts, I was not able to re-contact Alan and Sarah to find out how their situation had resolved itself

As we have seen, home education was a source of fulfilment for mothers through the expansion of the maternal role and the raising of their perceived status and power. For these mothers there was a sense of being 'needed' by their children and maintaining a central role in their children's lives. Mothers also found that they increased their enjoyment of the motherhood role through the intellectual stimulation associated with home education. This intellectual stimulation came from both learning alongside their children and also through their assumption of a facilitating role in their education.

Countering the fulfilment of home education was the intense and unrelenting labour that it demanded of mothers. Whilst the labour of home education provided fulfilment for mothers, the intensity of that labour could be emotionally and physically draining. Home educating meant that mothers were expected to perform numerous roles, many of which required significant skill and often the acquisition of specialist knowledge. The all-encompassing nature of home educators' broadened definitions of education meant that home education became more than a full-time job and required significant sacrifices on mothers' parts. Mothers made substantial sacrifices, both financially, practically and also emotionally, with the loss of what they described as 'me time' being one of the greatest struggles faced by home educating mothers.

Whilst home education significantly changed and extended mothers' roles, it did so predominantly by amplifying 'normal' dominant constructions and experiences of motherhood. These experiences, both of fulfilment and strain were amplified by the round-the-clock nature of home education and the way in which it extended mothers' intense relationships with their children beyond

'school-age', altering the temporal nature of motherhood (Lois 2010) and therefore extending mothers' requirements of themselves in that role.

The intensifying of the experiences of home educating mothers, both positive and negative, also meant that the balance between them was a fine one which relied on home educators' ability to put in place a variety of coping mechanisms to help them to deal with the intensity of home education and the constant contact with their children. Small changes in pressure upon mothers could therefore quickly upset the balance that they had achieved.

The precariousness of this balance between gain and strain was shown in the fact that mothers did not see home education as a state that was set in stone, instead they constructed it as an on-going decision which was subject to a range of variables. This decision was based around mothers' perceptions of their ability to 'cope' with the intense labour of home education rather than purely upon the perceived needs of their children. The importance which mothers placed, either consciously or unconsciously, upon their fulfilment in home educating suggests that, in many ways (and especially for Natural and Social home educators, who perceived home education as a choice) home education was as much about the mothers' needs and experiences as those of their children, creating a mother-centric model of home education.

Home educators therefore felt that it was possible that at some point they might cease home educating and that their children would at that point attend school. This was something that had happened for one family, whilst other families had experienced or were experiencing difficulties which might lead to the end of home education.

In order to continue home educating therefore, mothers' needed to feel that the intense labour of home education was balanced by the fulfilment they gained from it. This notion of balance is not one that has been raised in home education research before, although Lois' work on the 'burn out' of home educating mothers and their attempts to prevent it hints at the necessity of balance in order to continue home educating happily. Interestingly, Lois implies that her respondents did not see home education as precarious in the same way as my respondents, instead tending to struggle on without the balance that my respondents saw as necessary. This may be a result of the organised, accepted and widespread nature of home education in the US (Stevens 2001, Apple 2000, Stevens 1997, Stevens 2003), possibly making failure and withdrawal from home education less of an option for mothers.

8 Home Education: Motherhood through Childhood

Mainstream research in the Sociology of Education has neglected home education. Home education needs to be considered as part of sociological debate around educational choice, pedagogical constructions and education as an activity of motherhood. This thesis therefore addresses that lack and provides contributions to the literatures on school choice, maternal involvement in education and home-based pedagogical practices.

The research upon which this thesis is based explored the motivations, attitudes, methods and experiences of home educating parents in England and Wales. Being iterative and exploratory in nature, my focus shifted from parents in general, to mothers in particular as they emerged as the key figures in the day-to-day process of home education. What has been explored in this thesis is therefore primarily a mothers' story, something that is reinforced rather than contradicted by the contributions of the few fathers who involved themselves in my research.

The gendered division of labour is therefore in itself important in the construction of home education and in our understanding of it. The significance of mothers in home education in the US has been hinted at by McDowell (2000) and highlighted by Stevens (2001) and Apple (2006). However, only Stambach and David (2005) and Lois (2006, 2009, 2010) have explored the interaction of motherhood and home education in any significant depth prior to this research, making mine the first such study in England and Wales.

In this light, I return now to my original research questions in order to summarise and highlight the key findings of my research:

- How do home educating parents position themselves in relation to institutional models of education and how does this relate to their reasons for home educating?

In contrast to Van Galen's (1988) division of home educators into two groups and Rothermel's (2003) refusal to categorise home educators on the grounds of their diversity; my study identified three broad 'types' of home educator, each with a distinct attitude towards the notions of school-based education and state intervention in individuals' lives. Their positioning in relation to state and school served as motivators to home educate and also justification for their choice of home education.

Natural home educators view the structure and intent of the formal education system as inherently problematic and tend to hold an anti-authority stance which resists state intervention in family life. With a strong emphasis on responsibility for self and a belief that individuals should be free from coercion, Natural home educators rejected the notion of 'school', with its formalised structures and reliance upon 'professionals' as inherently oppressive. Without explicit knowledge of neo-Marxist discourses on education, they produced their own construction of school-based education which bore strong resemblance to the theorisations of Bowles and Gintis (1976), Althusser (1972) and Freire (1993). Within this framework children are constructed as independent beings in their own right with the mothers' role being to facilitate the child's education and to ensure children's freedom to develop by protecting them from coercion

by repressive institutions and cultures. Natural home educators were therefore expressing, through home education, their fear of coercion and their resistance to conformity.

Directly echoing the discourses of parents who choose private schooling for their children (Ball 2003, West, Noden 2003), Social home educators viewed interactions within schools as morally corrupt. They were concerned that the interactions of teachers and pupils within mainstream schools transmit values and culture at odds with those that they wish their children to be socialised into. Social home educators are therefore attempting to convey a consistent set of values to their children rather than opposing 'school' as a notion. The belief that, whilst they are unique individuals, children require careful socialisation in order to develop into complete adults means that motherhood is constructed by these home educators as primarily a responsibility to ensure the correct socialisation of their children and protect them from moral corruption.

Last Resort home educators have chosen home education in desperation because of problems their children have encountered at school. These parents are concerned with the failings of individual schools and teachers and the inability of their individual children to fit into the mould of 'normal' children. Their children's negative experiences of school lead them to construct their children both as unique individuals in their own right and as vulnerable 'becomings' in need of protection. The motherhood role is therefore constructed as one of protector and provider of individualised nurturing.

These typologies are heuristic, there is heterogeneity within each 'type' of home educator as well as significant overlap between the types. Effectively the three

types exist on a continuum of attitudes towards state and school, ranging from regarding the notion of state 'interference' and school as highly problematic, to seeing individual schools and individuals within schools as the problem. As well as significant differences between the attitudes and motivations of the three types of home educator identified there were also significant similarities.

One area of correspondence between home educators was a widespread fear of persecution by the authorities which stemmed from the discourse of persecution present in popular home education literature but previously unidentified by home education research. Associated with their fear of persecution was home educators' rupture of the state-parent co-responsibility relationship. Home educators' construction of responsibility rejected the dominant consensus of shared state/parental responsibility for the child. Mothers view their children as unique individuals with individual needs. They are therefore motivated to home educate as a solution to their individual concerns about schooling and about their children. Whilst there is general acknowledgement amongst home educating parents that home education is not suitable or feasible for all children, there is little interest in more general solutions to the problems of the formal education system, an attitude also flagged by Van Galen (1988) and Apple (2000).

Although home educators' attitudes towards school and state were important, they served as a justification and explanation for home education rather than a core motivation, especially for Natural and Social home educators. The key motivations for home education, especially in terms of whether to continue home educating, were mother-centric. This is an aspect of home education not previously explicitly stated, although it is hinted at by Stambach and David

(2005) in their analysis of home education as an expression of maternal involvement in education. Other literature defines home education as exclusively motivated by the needs of the child and is uncritical of maternal justification of home education in these terms (Stevens 2001, Rothermel 2011). In abandoning the state-parent co-responsibility relationship and rejecting school-based educational provision for their children, mothers were bringing both education and their children more fully within their sphere of the home. This centring of a greater proportion of childhood and education within the private sphere expanded motherhood, both in terms of importance and function and gave mothers a greater sense of fulfilment in their role, which in turn became a motivation for continuing home education.

- What is the inter-relationship of parents' motivations in home educating with their pedagogical models and practices?

The creation of home education as an enterprise which fulfilled mothers' needs for status, power and intellectual stimulation was linked to home educators' models and practices. The gendered division of labour in home education was therefore a key feature of home educators' practice, with home education being carried out predominantly by mothers. As part of the expansion of the maternal role through home education, home educators constructed very broad definitions of education which stretched beyond the acquisition of academic skills and knowledge. Education therefore became constructed as an extension of socialisation, rather than a distinct entity in its own right. As primary socialisation is a process closely associated with motherhood, education therefore became the rightful preserve of mothers.

This absorption of education within a broadened and extended notion of socialisation meant that notions of pedagogy became closely intertwined with notions of socialisation. Pedagogy therefore became as much an expression of notions of childhood and motherhood, and of the ways in which mothers facilitated or brought about the child's transition to adulthood as it was about formalised educational experiences or learning. As a result home educators' pedagogical models and practices tended to focus on the acquisition of a broad range of 'life skills', upon the preparation of children for eventual economic independence (possibly through academic achievement and qualifications) and upon social preparation for adult life. This meant that, while home education practices tended to place a level of importance on the acquisition of working literacy and numeracy, almost any activity could be constructed as 'educational'.

The attitudes to state and school expressed by each of the three types of home educator also had a significant influence upon their models and practices in home education. Natural home educators' emphasis upon responsibility for self, and their belief that the individual should be free from coercion by either the state or other individuals led them to reject the notion of 'school' and the educational practices associated with schools as inherently flawed. This rejection of formal academic learning overseen by professionals tended to translate into a model of home education which was child-led and highly individualised. Mothers were therefore constructed as facilitating learning experiences rather than as teachers. Natural home educators often aspired to 'autonomous' education which was totally child-led, following and feeding the child's emerging interests without any imposed structure or aims in order to avoid coercing their children.

For Social home educators the belief that, whilst they are unique individuals, children require careful socialisation and protection from negative influences meant that they rejected school on the basis of the potentially corrupting interactions between individuals which took place within them. Their non-rejection of the notion of school itself meant that home education among this type tended to be more formalised than that of Natural home educators. Alongside the broad socialisation of children there was therefore also a focus on formal academic learning that meant that aspects of Social home education intentionally reproduced education as carried out in conventional schools with some home educators settling on a school-at-home model.

The home education practices of Last Resort home educators were highly individualised according to the child's needs and personality. This approach followed from the construction of their children as vulnerable and damaged and therefore the mothering role as one of protector. The extension of the definition of education and its coalescence with the socialisation process meant that the pedagogical aims of Last Resort parents were the protection and rehabilitation of their individual children. There was therefore an emphasis on the achievement of individual potential rather than a measuring of educational success against any conventional measures.

Home educators' motivations to home educate meant that they were, in different ways, rejecting mainstream school-based interpretations of education. Mothers saw themselves as re-imagining education in a range of different ways and constructed their methods of home education as qualitatively different from that of schools. However, this re-imagination was actually limited and tended to unintentionally reproduce pedagogical methods and aims associated with

schools alongside conventional socialising practices. This was true even of Natural home educators who, despite having aspirations towards child-led learning, found themselves unable to abandon conventional expectations of academic learning and achievement and the associated expectations of their roles as mothers and teachers. This suggests that, while an understanding of home educators pedagogical constructions may contribute to broader understandings of parental involvement in education, they are unlikely to contribute much in terms of new pedagogical models and methods.

- How do parents experience parenthood through home education?

The terms 'parenthood' and 'parents' in accounts of home education, both in the literature and in my fieldwork plans, overlooked the gendered nature of parental involvement in education, displaying gendered assumptions about roles in home education, as also noted by Stambach and David (2005). 'Parents' experiences of home education were therefore predominantly mothers' experiences. Across the different types of home educator, the consistency of notions of responsibility, conservative models of motherhood drawing on an ideology of intensive mothering (Lois 2009, Hays 1998) and notions of children as individual but incomplete, meant that mothers' experiences of HE were remarkably consistent across all types.

Home education is a 'mother-centric' enterprise. The experiences, attitudes and needs of mothers are key both to the choice of home education, day-to-day home educating practices, and to the continuation of home education by a family. A key facet of home education was its role in making life more interesting for mothers. Full-time motherhood can be a very monotonous,

limiting and frustrating role for women (Gatrell 2008, Miller 2005). As Stambach and David (2005) and Lois (2009) note in a US context, home education expanded mothers' roles and lent them an aspect of professionalism whilst at the same time allowing them to conform more fully to idealised dominant constructions of motherhood. I argue that this role expansion through home education offered mothers the opportunity to escape the monotony of motherhood and instead experience fulfilment in it.

My respondents' constructions of motherhood tended to follow dominant conservative models, with mothers taking responsibility for the majority of childcare and domestic labour and performing an expressive role of emotional nurture and stabilisation within the family. Mothers' placed significant emphasis upon their responsibility for their children due to the relational nature of the mothering role, and also upon the unique individuality of their children which created mothers as experts upon their children and their role as indispensable. Home educating mothers centred their lives around their children, in accordance with dominant ideals of motherhood. However, in nominally fulfilling their children's needs, mothers were fulfilling their own ideals and constructions of 'good' mothering thereby bringing the focus of home education back to themselves.

In broadening their definitions of education and integrating education into an expanded notion of childhood socialisation, mothers reinforced their construction of their mothering role as crucial as well as lengthening the period for which their power over their children's lives was dominant. In constructing their children as in need of preparation (to a greater or lesser extent) for adulthood, and in acknowledging their children's eventual need to be integrated

into wider society, mothers were increasing the perceived importance of their mothering activities and therefore their sense of status. This process was in accord with Stambach and David's (2005) analysis of the increased involvement of mothers in education as a reinforcement of traditional constructions of family and gender roles rather than as a means of feminist liberation – what Bobel (2001) terms 'bounded liberation'.

Mothers' increased power, their lengthened involvement in their children's lives and also the intellectual stimulation that they found in educating their children and in learning alongside them meant that home education brought fulfilment for mothers in their role. These amplifications of the motherhood role functioned to reduce the perceived monotony of mothering and thereby increase mothers' enjoyment of it.

At the same time as home education brought mothers fulfilment by raising their role above the monotony of 'ordinary' motherhood, it also required intense labour and significant sacrifices from them both practically and emotionally, an aspect that only Lois (2006, 2010) seems to have acknowledged previously. While aspects of the intense labour of home education also brought fulfilment, they could simultaneously be draining, and the subsuming of mothers' identities to those of their children (which was a key aspect of home education) could in itself become constricting.

There was therefore a fine balance between mothers' satisfaction and fulfilment and their labour in home education. Something not considered by previous research, this balance made the state of home educating a precarious one. Mothers devised a range of coping mechanisms to maintain that balance, with

the concept and negotiation of 'me time' being important. All mothers, however, felt that it was possible that at some point a change in circumstances would disturb the fine balance in which satisfaction in home education was held, leading to the cessation of home education.

The home education experience, with its unbounded nature and the close contact between mother and child for long unbroken periods of time (both on a day-to-day basis and across periods of years) was an intense one in both its pleasures and pains. This meant that, whilst mothers' constructions of motherhood were largely conservative and conventional, reflecting the dominant experiences of mothers in England and Wales as expressed in the broader literature on motherhood, their experiences of these constructions as lived out in their mothering roles were amplified by the intensity of home education. Mothers performed their expanded role for longer and in a more unbroken way than the mothers of schooled children exacerbating both their enjoyment of motherhood and its labour and frustrations. The strain of the contrast between fulfilment and labour was therefore also amplified, making the balance between the two finer and more precarious than might otherwise have been expected. In the same way that a see-saw with long arms is very sensitive to small changes in loading, it only took a small decrease in the enjoyment of home education or a small increase in the sacrifices or labour of home education to upset the balance between the two.

Mothers therefore constructed home education as a practice that currently met their needs, but that might cease to do so at any point in the future, at which point they would cease to home educate their children. Mothers' needs were therefore prioritised over those of their children and home education was as

much in the interests of the mothers as those of their children, especially in the case of Natural and Social home educators. For Last Resort home educators, the often traumatic experiences of schooling and the attempts that had been made to keep their children in school, meant that home education was meeting the needs for recovery and restoration for both mothers and children in a way that was not just about personal preferences for education and status. For these mothers there was an additional sense that their needs were a priority because they had to be able to cope with the stresses of home education in order to make it work for their children.

Implications & Applications

I now turn to consider the implications of my findings, their contributions to knowledge and the possibilities for further research that they open up. By its very nature this study, and therefore its findings, has its limitations. As a small-scale qualitative study with a non-representative sample, my findings cannot be assumed to be generalisable to the whole home educating population in England and Wales. The current impossibility of carrying out a representative study means that this is not a problem that can be easily remedied and so the question about generalisability must remain. Extending and building upon this research therefore probably remains the remit of further non-representative studies. This of course means that my findings can, and must, remain open to contestation and dismissal as non-representative. However, I believe that they provide a valuable snapshot of home educators and their experiences which raises important points concerning home education, motherhood and education.

The uncovering of home education as existing in a state of precarious balance determined by mothers' experiences and fulfilment raises a number of questions that are worthy of further research. Although Jackson's (Jackson 2007) Australian study examines children's experiences of the transition between home education and schooling, there appear to be no studies of the breakdown of home education, either of how often this happens or under what conditions. If home education is as fragile as my study suggests it to be, I would expect there to be numerous breakdowns in home education. Such research would give further valuable insights into the pressures of home education. This particular gap in the literature is perhaps a reflection of the lack of objective research into home education as well as the sampling difficulties inherent to any study of home education.

The precarious nature of home education means that while it may be an alternative to schooling for some families it is not a replacement for school. All the mothers in my study had either contemplated school for their children at some point or could see themselves doing so should they be unable to maintain the balance between labour and fulfilment. Indeed there is a question that is worthy of further research, of whether the ready availability of school makes home education a more viable choice and more tolerable situation for mothers. The presence of school may essentially act as a perceived safety net for home educators in the same way that the construction of motherhood as a time-sensitive role makes mothers see the sacrifices of their role as more bearable (Lois 2010, Wall 2001).

As it is not a replacement for school, home education is therefore essentially an extension of the 'school' choice options, sitting alongside state-maintained and

private schooling. This is a dimension of educational choice that has been largely ignored by the Sociology of Education. Some of home educators' motivations for home education and objections to school echo parents' justifications for their choice of private education. Whilst this thesis has examined parents'[43] choice of home education and found some similarities to the motivations for private school choice described in the literature, it has not specifically considered home education as part of the educational choice spectrum. This is an area that is worthy of further research.

The fact that home education is not a replacement for school contradicts the views of those such as Tooley (2000) and Fortune-Wood (2005, 2006) who claim that the growth of home education chips away at conventional models of schooling. The fact that home educators, despite their attempts to and hopes of re-imagining education, tend to employ variations on conventional pedagogical methods and aims (often despite their best intentions) also suggests that existing models of education and schooling have been internalised as part of the broader social consciousness and are not therefore under serious threat.

My findings identify three core areas of dissatisfaction and disillusionment with school-based education which have caused parents to seek other educational provision through home education. Firstly there is for some home educators a broader anti-state and anti-authority sentiment which rejects schooling as an expression of the state and authority. Contrary to the US literature on home education, these home educators are not primarily religiously motivated. Although not all home educators are inherently anti-state, all have rejected the

43 I use the term parents because as has been seen, the decision to home educate was one in which fathers participated and had considerable power, as well as mothers.

notion of a state-parent relationship of co-responsibility for their children and all are affected to some extent by the discourse of persecution that popular home education literature has constructed around that rejection.

Secondly is the view of schools as morally corrupt places that place children's proper socialisation at risk. This construction echoes both the media-raised concerns about education in 'crisis' that I reflected upon in the introduction to this thesis, and the choice rationalisations of parents choosing private schooling for their children. Thirdly is the view of schools as acceptable for 'normal' children, but as unable to meet the needs of children who are individuals and who have specific, out of the ordinary, individual needs, leading to potentially traumatising experiences. Both of these constructions create schools as potentially dangerous environments in a more extreme way than the literature on parents and private schooling. This is therefore a view which is worthy of further investigation to ascertain whether it is widespread or confined solely to home educators.

The gendered division of labour and roles within home education is something that is worthy of further research as it identifies a significant gap in the existing literature (particularly in England and Wales) which either ignores the gendered roles within home education or makes uncritical assumptions about them. My analysis of this gendered division also makes a contribution to the broader literature on motherhood. Existing literature identifies paid work as the core way for mothers to find relief from the monotony and low status of the mothering role, with its associated feelings of guilt and notions of 'bad' mothering. This study has identified home education as another means by which mothers can gain stimulation and overcome the monotony of mothering, whilst maintaining

and even extending their fulfilment of idealised constructions of 'good' mothering. At the same time this thesis also confirms the continuing dominance of traditional constructions of the feminine mothering role as caring and nurturing and therefore holding primary responsibility for child socialisation.

As the key theme of home education as mother-centric emerged from an iterative, inductive, and therefore evolving, research process, this area would benefit from a more specific research focus. A similar, or larger scale, qualitative study of home educators could examine and build upon these findings in a more structured and in-depth way. There is also a comparative study to be carried out looking at the experiences and coping mechanisms of home educating mothers and their constructions of motherhood in direct comparison to mothers of schooled children.

I suspect that this thesis may not be well received within the home educating community, especially in parts of the research community which, although small, is often highly divided between those who are advocates of home education and those who view it as a social phenomenon of interest and possible social significance. Although I have tried my best to approach this research sensitively and objectively the findings are likely to be unpalatable to some. People who view themselves as breaking away from dominant culture do not like to be informed that their 'new' models of education and the parent-child relationship are in fact a re-working, and sometimes an amplification, of traditional models. In terming home education in England and Wales as 'under-researched' there is also an implicit (and I think correct) criticism of those whose research is carried out with the explicit aim of promoting home education.

Whilst such research may have its place and function, it cannot be regarded or listened to in the same way as research whose aims are at least more objective.

My personal interest in and ambivalence regarding home education are what prompted this thesis and in many ways I have journeyed personally alongside it. Towards the end of my fieldwork I became, almost overnight, the adoptive mother of three children, two school-aged and one pre-school-aged, two of whom have significant additional needs. At one point, in circumstances that could not have been foreseen when I began my research, I had to contemplate becoming a Last Resort home educator as one of my sons struggled significantly with school. In our case, a supportive and effective response from the school, and my certainty that I would struggle to maintain the balance which my respondents had described to me meant that our son has remained in school. My ambivalence regarding home education remains, but this thesis is, in many ways, a reflection of my own experiences and it is undoubted that my later analysis and writing has been influenced by my own experiences of motherhood and by my children's experiences of education as these were points of commonality with my respondents.

Rather than seeing these personal influences as negative, I would argue that they have given me a greater appreciation of the complexities of the relationships between motherhood, childhood and education and have provided me with the sociological imagination necessary to explore them in an in-depth way.

In summary, my research set out to examine the motivations and experiences of home educating parents. It has uncovered complex relationships between the

constructions of education, childhood and motherhood within home education and has delineated home education as mother-centric in nature rather than being child-centred. My research and this resulting thesis do not set out to condemn or criticise the participants who were so very generous with their time and open with their accounts of home educating. Uncovering home education as 'mother-centric' rather the child-centred model that most believe it to be does not make it inherently negative. I am not suggesting that home education's mother-centric nature is either abusive or any more harmful to children than other parenting behaviours, although it does make the questions regarding children's versus parents' rights asked by Monk (2004b, 2004a, 2003) more pertinent. There is a real and valid concern that home education might be more likely to be harmful to children if their mothers' needs are not met within it. The analogy of an airline safety announcement regarding oxygen masks is useful here: 'If you are travelling with a child or someone who requires assistance, secure your own mask first'. Especially given the intense labour and sacrifices it involves, if home education is not mother-centric then there is a question as to whether it would ever be able to meet the needs of the child.

Appendices

Appendix A: Biographical Notes

Selina (Natural)
Selina was a South African who had been living in England for 4 years, having moved to England with her husband, Caleb, a surgeon, who had come to undergo advanced training. Selina and Caleb had 4 children, Ruth (11), Liezl (8), Mia (5) and Katrin (2). All their children were home educated and had never been to school. Selina, a trained teacher, held responsibility for home education.

Alan & Sarah (Natural)
Alan and Sarah were living with their daughter Saffron (5) and Sarah's daughter Gemma (12) in a yurt in an alternative community in Wales. Both girls were home educated, Gemma having been removed from school at age 8 and Saffron never having been to school. At the time of the interview Gemma was saying that she wished to return to school. Alan and Sarah had both previously been managers in the public sector but had given up their jobs to pursue an alternative lifestyle, with home education being part of this lifestyle. They shared the responsibility of home educating Gemma and Saffron between them, but both admitted that Sarah was the driving force behind it. Sarah had recently started working part-time in a local shop.

Charles & Jill (Natural)
Charles and Jill had home educated their two children, Lois (16) and Rupert (14) from birth and regarded themselves as pioneers in home education. Charles was a retired sound engineer and held an engineering degree whilst Jill was a music teacher. Responsibility for home education was shared between them, although both acknowledged Jill to be the driving force.

Janet (Social)
Janet had four children, Marion (9), Elise (8), Nina (6) and Sally (5) They had been home educating for four years. Janet was qualified as an occupational therapist but had been at home full time since the birth of her daughters and held responsibility for home education, her husband was a pharmacist working as a senior manager for a pharmaceuticals company.

Hilary (Last Resort)
Hilary had two adult children who had been educated in the mainstream school system and one adoptive daughter, Beth (14). Beth had been taken out of school towards the end of year 6 (final year of primary school) due to extensive bullying and learning difficulties which meant that she was struggling academically. Hilary had worked at the local post office prior to home educating Beth, her husband worked as a structural engineer.

Lydia (Last Resort)
Lydia had two children, Karen (14) and Daniel (16), both had been removed from school in Year 8 (second year of secondary school). Daniel had

experienced extensive and persistent bullying throughout primary which had intensified at secondary school. Karen was removed from school following her refusal to return after a period of illness, it had gradually emerged since then that she had also been seriously bullied by her peers at school. Lydia had been a full-time mother since the births of her children and took responsibility for home education, her husband worked as a computer programmer.

Anna (Last Resort)
Anna was a single mother with two children, Sandy (15) and Andrew (5). Sandy had been home educated from the age of 12 but had recently enrolled full-time at the local sixth form college. Andrew was attending a mainstream school with no plans for him to be home educated. Sandy had been removed from school following bullying and also due to her fragile mental health, Sandy had attempted suicide on several occasions, most recently two days before I interviewed Anna. Anna worked delivering training for a local company.

Jeannette (Last Resort)
Jeanette was the mother of eight children, two of whom had been home educated. Her adopted son George, had been withdrawn from the final two years of school some years previously in an attempt to address his behavioural problems. Her birth daughter Rosie (15) was autistic and had struggled in several different schools before being withdrawn from school aged 8. Jeanette was a trained teacher, as was her husband.

Sophie (Social)
Sophie had three children, Megan (9), Owain (6) and Johnny (18 months). They lived in an isolated village with no access to public transport and only one car which Mark (her husband) tended to use for work. Megan and Owain had previously been educated at a private Christian school which both Sophie and Mark had been happy with, however when moving for Mark's job they had been unable to find a school that they were happy with and had therefore chosen to home educate their children. Sophie held an MSc in Mathematics and had trained as a teacher but had never taught in a school, her husband was a statistician.

Tanya (Social)
Tanya and her husband had 11 children, ranging in age between 23 and 2 years old. Tanya had home educated all her children for faith reasons, she felt it was part of her parental responsibility as an evangelical Christian. Tanya had attained O'levels before leaving school. Tanya took full responsibility for the home education of her children as well as running a small business importing and selling home education materials, whilst her husband ran a nursery business.

James (Social)
James was the only male in my study who held the main responsibility for home educating whilst his wife, Rebecca, worked full-time as a chaplain. James and Rebecca had removed their daughter, Caitlin (7) from school during her Reception year and were now also home educating their son, Howard (5). James had felt that much time at school was wasted and also worried about the

socialisation Caitlin had been receiving at school.

Cathy & Patrick (Social/Natural)
Cathy and Patrick had three daughters: Alana (13), Karis (10) and Sara (8), who had never attended school. They had chosen home education because Cathy was concerned about the social interactions within schools, Patrick was concerned about the political nature of the school system and both felt that their children had individual needs that would not be met in school. Cathy and Patrick shared responsibility for home education, with Cathy taking the lead role as Patrick's poor health meant that his participation could not be relied upon. Cathy was a trained school teacher and prior to his illness, Patrick had been running a successful business.

Lindsay (Last Resort)
Lindsay was a single mother who had been home educating her daughter Leanne (15) for two years. Leanne had been withdrawn from school following bullying. Although she had agreed to be interviewed, Lindsay was highly suspicious of my motives and refused to give any details of her education or occupation.

Beth (Natural)
Beth and her partner Kai had three children: Nathan (7), Aiden (5) and Aimee (3). The children had never been to school and Beth and Kai had chosen to home educate them because of a lack of trust in the state and its institutions. Beth held responsibility for home education whilst Kai was employed as an academic at a local university.

Hannah (Social)
Hannah had been home educating her daughter Alison (15) for four years. Alison had been withdrawn from school at the point of transfer to secondary school due to her parents' fears about the social interactions and moral influences within school and also as they had expected to move to the US part-way through the first year of secondary school. Hannah had been a full-time mother since Alison's birth, her husband Adam was a freelance management trainer and consultant.

Jenny (Last Resort)
Jenny had officially been home educating her daughter Helena (14) for only six months, but she had not attended school for over two years due to suffering from ME. Jenny's decision to home educate had been taken as a reaction to pressure from Helena's school to return Helena school despite her continuing ill-health. Jenny was trained as a bank-clerk and her husband worked as a personnel manager.

Emma (Last Resort)
Emma was the single mother of two children. Ralph (13) had been home educated for 18 months whilst his elder sister had remained at school. Ralph was autistic and had found school difficult to deal with as well as having been bullied. Emma worked part-time as a pay-roll administrator.

Denise (Social)
Denise and Alan had three children: Harriet (15), Liam (12) and Aaron (7) and had been home educating for seven years. Harriet and Liam had been withdrawn from school because of concerns about the social interactions and their lack of academic and social progress. Aaron had never attended school. Liam, who had ADHD had recently returned to school as Alan's recent ill-health combined with Liam's behaviour had proved too difficult to cope with. Denise, a trained teacher, held responsibility for home education, while Alan worked as a nurse.

Gail (Social)
Gail and her husband had two children: Martha (11) and Marie (9), neither of whom had attended school. They had chosen home education due to concerns about the social interactions within school and their view of their children as individuals with suspected ASD. Gail was a trained teacher, while her husband was an engineer.

Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent Form

*This is an agreement for **you**, as a participant in my research, to ensure that you understand what is requested of you in the research and your rights with regard to your role in the research.*

I have had the research explained to me in person or read the information available on the website (http://homeeducation.wordpress.com).

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason.
- Everything I say in interviews will be confidential (unless it is felt that something presents a serious and real risk to my or someone else's wellbeing).
- I will not be identifiable from anything that I produce as a result of this research – both I and any organisations will be anonymised.

In signing below you are saying that you understand the above statements and agree to take part in the research.

Signed: ……

Name: ……

Date: ……

Signed: ……

Ruth Morton

Appendix C: Information Sheet

Home Education Research

I (Ruth Morton) am carrying out this research for my PhD in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick.

Why do this research?

Basically there is an awful lot of debate about education - about whether schools are doing what they should be, and about better ways of educating children. Home education is one example of alternative ways parents are choosing to educate their children and as a growing phenomenon it is worth knowing more about.

So what am I aiming to do?

To put it very simply, my research aims to look at how home educating families view education - both school and home-based, to look at how their reasons for home educating are related to the way they go about home educating, and to look at how much choice children have in decisions about their education.

What are your rights and my responsibilities?

- You can take part in as little or as much of the research as you want to
- You can change your mind about any interviews or meetings at any time
- You can withdraw from the study at any point
- You can ask for any information you have given to be removed from the study and I will do so
- All data will be anonymised before it is used in my thesis or any other public context.

What will the research involve?

The research will mainly be based around informal Interviews - these may take place one-to-one with me or in your family and you may be asked to participate in several. I may also use other methods with you (with your agreement) such as photo-journals.

What will the data be used for?

After it has been anonymised (changing names and places so that individual participants cannot be identified) the data will be analysed to help me answer my research questions. It will then be used in my PhD thesis and I may also use it in articles for journals and conferences. So I may quote things that you have said (although you will not be named). I will also provide a report on my findings for participants so that you know what I have found.

If you have any more questions then please ask, you can contact me:
By Phone: 07817 864235
By E-mail: r.b.morton@warwick.ac.uk

My supervisors are Andrew Parker andrew.parker@warwick.ac.uk , and Christina Hughes c.l.hughes@warwick.ac.uk

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